



## PHD

### **Excitement, bewilderment and emergence: Exploring a life world through writing as first person inquiry**

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*Award date:*  
2007

*Awarding institution:*  
University of Bath

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**Excitement, bewilderment and emergence: exploring a life  
world through writing as first person inquiry.**

Volume 1 of 1


*Robert Miles Farrands.*

A thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
University of Bath  
School of Management, Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice  
(CARPP)  
May 2007

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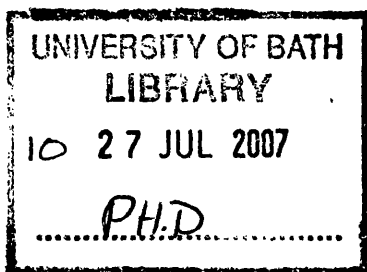
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## *Acknowledgments*

My inquiry has involved an examination of myself in my situation in the world. This has involved bringing those most dear to me within the fold of my work. My wife Bridget and my children Alice, Tom and Joe have borne this with an understanding and support, which have been absolutely essential to my ability to work. My heart goes out, particularly to Bridget, who has never stinted in her support, even when she might have had cause to do more than raise an eyebrow. This support has not been limited to letting me be, or to tolerating my disappearance into my study, or book. In addition Bridget has been a constant, questioning companion, always interested, and usually challenging.

It is impossible to read this thesis without noticing the presence of my supervisor Professor Judi Marshall. She is often present in dialogue with me over my writing, posing questions, and encouraging me to find my own question-ability. Throughout the thesis she has shown great faith that I would find my way through, even when I had my own serious doubts. Her balanced, insightful, accompanying commentaries on my writing, and my life world, have been one of the delights of my work.

In CARPP we supervise each other in groups, and, as you will see in the thesis, my supervision group plays an essential part in my research story. I feel like apologising to those who have been in my group over the years, for I fear I have, on more occasions than I would have liked, been a bit of a pain. I particularly admire the persistence and critical minds of Kathleen King, Sue Porter and Chris Seeley.

My Gestalt heritage looms large in this thesis, and indeed in my life. Certain teachers such as Sonia and Edwin Nevis, Judith Hemming and Malcolm Parlett are referenced directly, and quoted in the thesis. These and others such as the original Gestalt psychologists also haunt the pages, showing their presence through my abiding interest in the emblematic idea of gestalt form. I hope I might be able to offer something back to these compassionate, questing friends.

I would also like to thank the members of the Iffley Group, a professional supervision group, which has met regularly throughout the time I have been embarked on the doctoral programme (and has included a men's group as an off-shoot). They have provided a continual source of work related inspiration, and personal insight.

I also think of friends and particular clients who have provided me with a continuing source of support, both intellectual and emotional, just when it was needed. I think of Margareta and Lars Marmgren, Paul Clipson, Robin Coates, Malcolm Tulloch, Mark Carne, Nicola Gordon and Paul Rookwood in particular.

Lastly I think of this place, my home, and of my dog Feste. The latter has accompanied me on many walks in many states of the weather: he has also had to endure many a monologue on Merleau-Ponty – if there is a next life he is sure to be a philosopher, or a therapist.

Iffley, Oxford  
May, 2007

## ***Abstract***

### ***Excitement, bewilderment and emergence: exploring a life world through writing as first person inquiry***

How can I find vitality and change in my 50s? How can first person action research help me to locate the exciting questions in my life, and help me re-visit the sources of my life energy? Responding to these personal questions leads me into other areas of inquiry concerning my experience of life. How are processes of knowing related to experience? What is it to participate in the world?

As I engage with these questions I am drawn into a re-engagement, and a re-ordering of the intellectual structure of my life. I discover the existential phenomenology of *Merleau-Ponty*, and use the freshness of this encounter to reinvigorate my historic connection with Gestalt; also to provide a perspective on action research. The interaction between these three domains of knowledge provides the intellectual stimulus for the thesis.

The core research material for the thesis is the documentation of my life world, as recorded in series of thirty papers, produced and reflected upon in group supervision, between March 2001 and July 2006. This material describes a stream of activity from my life, including my consulting and family life. *Paying attention* to my life world, and *describing* it in *writing* are central features of my research method. I engage with writing as an *emergent* form of inquiry.

The thesis that describes, and inquires into, this documentation of my life world was written between July 2006 and March 2007.



## INTRODUCTION

In this Introduction I set out the research themes within the context of my approach towards action research. This leads me to frame the thesis in terms of dynamic processes, which support my inquiry into energy and excitement in my life. I then explain in more detail the part that writing plays in my first person inquiry. I close by introducing some of the other people who appear in the thesis, focusing attention on those who it would be helpful for the reader to know about at the very beginning of the thesis.

The thesis was written in the period from *July 2006 to April 2007*, and describes a programme of research, which commenced in *March 2001*, conducted under the auspices of a part time doctoral programme at the Centre for Research in Professional Practice at the University of Bath (CARPP). It is primarily a first person study using the description of events in my life world as the core research material. Maintaining a chronological flow is one of the structures of the thesis. However, it has not always proved appropriate to stick to a strictly linear sequence, as other priorities have intruded to re direct the narrative. For this reason, in the following paragraphs, I set out an outline of key events occurring during the period covered by the research, as they relate to this work. I intend this to act like brief preparatory description of the journey to come.

I entered the doctoral programme in *March 2001* in confident mood. In September 2000 I had completed an MSc course at Bath University for which I had been awarded a distinction, and shortly afterwards I had produced my first ever piece of published writing (Farrands 2001). To be quite frank, I rather thought I would sail through the doctoral programme, relying on descriptions of my process consulting (as with my published article), allied to the wisdom I thought I had accrued with age, and consequent life experience. With hindsight my initiating research interests were a little underdeveloped, which was one sign of my over confident state. I was conscious of the way that my role as a process consultant had contributed towards heightened responsiveness to my clients needs, and to a consequent sense that I had lost my own direction. I asked, where am I in this life of mine? I asked this question naively as I was shortly to discover.

To some extent the doctoral journey may be described as a tale of hubris, as I fell from this rather over confident initiating state, to discover what it was like to really ask serious questions of a life. The falling aspects of the doctoral journey gathered themselves together into two events of great significance for the journey. These events have shaped the whole progress of the research, and are not now so easy to see around as I look back. It seems clear, however, that the first event was predicated on a rapid expansion, during 2001 and early 2002, of the scope of my doctoral interests, as I was encouraged to bring a more inquiring eye into the whole of my life – not just the professional aspects. I began to write more personally, and to bring more and more of my private life ‘into play’ in the research: I became much more intimately invested in the work. On the back

of this increased personal commitment, in *March 2002*, I introduced a clever idea from my process consulting, into a review of my writing conducted in a meeting of our CARPP Supervision Group. This thoughtless experiment (described more fully in Chapter Three) led to a significant crisis in which I discovered myself totally unable to prevent a collapse into a kind of graceless, juvenile behaviour; my claimed skills in human process proved to be of no use to me in that moment. I was embarrassed and metaphorically stripped bare by the experience as I describe in Chapter Three. This event was followed by an increase in personal writing, and by a period of increasingly centripetal energy in the doctoral journey, which culminated in my failed attempt to transfer from MPhil to PhD status in *July 2003*<sup>1</sup>. With hindsight it looks as though this period from March 2002 to July 2003 was a necessary step on the journey, but at the time I felt lost and blinded as to what was happening to me. I responded by writing of how I felt, and by turning my gaze back towards important aspects of my past, including my training in Gestalt therapy.

The second event was more life shaking. It provided a grim background to the whole process of writing the thesis during 2006, and still resonates strongly in my life. In *November 2005* my eldest child, Alice, was diagnosed with cancer. In the struggle to help and to understand I was shown a great gift: that what I cared for in my life was vulnerable, fragile and transient. I began by realising this in respect of my daughter, but eventually I looked up at the world around me, to notice that this simple, but profound, fact had always been there on the surface in respect of everything worthy of love and attention. Alice's illness obviously carried consequences and concerns that went beyond my doctoral research, and I felt extremely nervous on the question of how to publicly relate what was happening. In the end I elected to excise from the thesis much of the direct description of events with Alice and my family, focussing instead on impacts and consequences for me, which, in my opinion, had direct relevance to the work of the thesis. Perhaps the most significant of these "impacts" and "consequences" for this thesis is that the events of late 2005 and 2006 acted to confirm the importance in my life of phenomenology, and, in particular, of the works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

I had stumbled across the work of this French philosopher and phenomenologist in *August 2003*, at a Roots of Gestalt conference in Paris. I was fascinated and excited. He appeared to me like an oasis in the desert,

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<sup>1</sup> The transfer meeting in July 2003 was one in which I presented papers to an internal examiner. My work was critiqued for being unclear in its purpose, and self orientated; I was asked to do some further writing. In August 2003, shortly after this transfer meeting I encountered Merleau-Ponty and dived into phenomenology. As a result, I deferred completing further writing for the transfer until I had re-shaped my intention for the doctoral thesis in the light of my new interests. I eventually re-submitted papers and transferred in January 2005. The word "failed" here might be a little dramatic, but it accords with my sense, at the time, that I had somehow run into the sand or lost my way; I will continue to use it in this evocative way in relation to the July 2003 transfer meeting.

and I drank deeply. Through my willing apprenticeship I began to see my Gestalt heritage through new eyes – to value it afresh. Also I learned to wrench my gaze from myself out into the world of other things. The second half of the doctoral journey is signified by a steady increase in centrifugal energy, and by a re-introduction to my feeling body in its interweaving with the world. It seems to me to be ironic that this middle class Englishman should be shown his carnal, sensual, connectivity through the frequently difficult prose of a French philosopher, but that, I claim, is what has happened. If nothing else he showed me how to weep again at the sheer wonder of what was around me, and, when the time, came I was able to weep again in love and grief.

Focusing on difficult moments of hubris might leave the impression that I have had an unhappy time of my doctoral studies. This would be a mistaken impression as I hope will be seen in what follows. I have discovered new friends, gradually begun to feel a part of a new community of inquirers, and found great stimulation and joy through phenomenology. The ground of my life has been turned over, and new shoots stir.

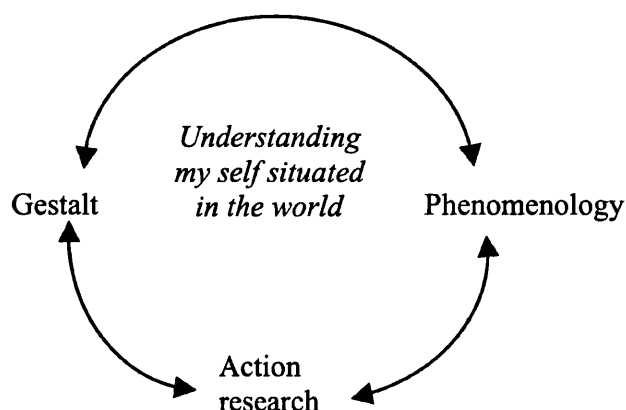
### 0.1 Research themes for the Thesis

The initiating questions for this thesis are first person: they concern energy and excitement in my 50s. How can I find vitality and change in my 50s? How can first person action research help me locate the exciting questions in my life, and help me re-visit the sources of my life energy? These questions lead me into other areas of inquiry concerning my experience of life. How are processes of knowing related to experience? What is it to participate in the world? Responding to these questions draws me into a re-engagement, and a re-ordering of the intellectual structure of my life. From mid 2003 I enthusiastically engage in a dialogue between new knowledge (for me) about existential phenomenology, and a heritage of Gestalt knowing. This engagement sets up a kind of intellectual force field within which the more personal inquiries take place. The total field is subject to reversibility as the personal and intellectual aspects move in and out of

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EXHIBIT 0.1: Intellectual dynamics in the thesis

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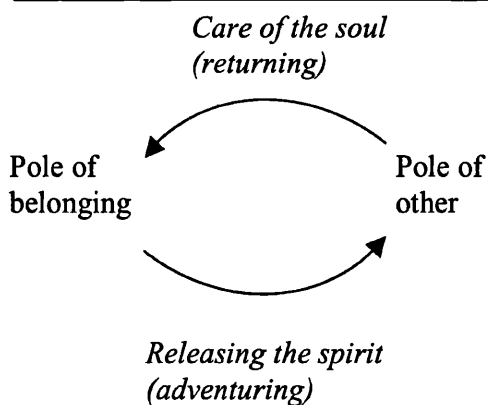
focus.

The personal aspects of this inquiry resolve themselves into a movement towards self-analysis, which at first is focused on my relationships with others: is there something corrupted in my contact with others? I identify this line of first person inquiry as irrevocably connected to another that asks, how am I situated in the world? This sets up a double aspect to my inquiry as I look towards how I am placed in the world, and also to how I move from that place into contact with other people, and the whole world ‘other’ than myself. The energy imparted by the process of re-thinking my intellectual frame leaks into my practice of living, to inspire fresh specific questions about relating to other persons living and dead. How do I love my wife and children? How does my dead grandfather still influence my relationships with my sons? I glimpse the fundamentally dynamic aspects of all these questions: to live is to be in motion. How do I know this movement? There is no complete resolution of this question within this thesis. The achievement is more modestly realised in the form of a restructured set of questions with which to go forward. These questions accentuate the double movement that has developed throughout the thesis: on the one hand reaching back to my placement as a historic being in the world and on the other reaching forward to the adventure of contact with ‘other’. This double movement might serve to symbolise the thematic content of the thesis. In the final Chapter of the thesis I come to present this interrelationship as a core dynamic theme for the whole thesis.

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EXHIBIT 0.2: dynamics of self-analysis

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I have used the terms “soul” and “spirit” to collect together a number of distinguishing terms that emerge out of the thesis. I use them as a kind of shorthand for two conceptual positions that arise from the way the themes announced in the first two paragraphs above are dealt with. “Sprit” I have taken as synonymous with the move to freedom and engagement with other people, and the more than human, that I take from the way in which Reason

and Bradbury speak of the participative world-view in the Action Research Handbook (2001: 10-11). Dynamically I see this as a movement out into the world of contact with others, whereby we “reach for our fullest capabilities” (ibid). I hold this in contrast with a correlated movement back into the historic, cultural and natural ground of our being; a returning motion towards belonging to a place in the world. This I see as a movement of earth – a return to place. The distinction arose for me as a useful one from out of a discussion my colleague Margareta Marmgren and I had together, and then with a group of leaders on a programme we were running on Cape Cod in June 2005. We had wanted to provide a counterweight in a discussion about vision, and grand purpose by also speaking of the soul work for leaders. My notebook records this from a discussion Margareta and I had:

It is hard to move until attention is paid to what holds the system where it is. [That is] Why we teach starting with what is. Vision work is spirit work – about moving on. What leaders will often miss is the soul of the organisation –it’s primary loyalties. These need acknowledging (Volume 4: 101).

The thinking here clearly shows the influence of my engagement with constellations work in 2005 (Chapter Five). Why do I need this kind of “big” distinction?

Fundamentally, my engagement with the themes I have sketched above involves me in deep troublesome paradoxes. For example I seem to block my energy through being both selfless and self obsessed. How does that work? How do I make sense of it for myself? In the complexity of paradox in which I find myself in Chapters Four and Five of the thesis it helps me to have this broad distinguishing frame as a thinking tool. I use it to map my situation and reflect on the ways in which I defeat myself. As such the distinction contained in Exhibit 0.2 is more of an epistemological tool than a conclusion of the thesis. I introduce it here so that I might use it as I discuss method, and, secondly, so you might be given a glimpse of the type of direction I am intending to travel in by glancing at one of the maps I develop.

#### *Correlation between research themes and my approach to action research*

The first person, existential nature of these themes leads me to focus attention on those aspects of action research that emphasise attention to lived experience, and emergent processes of inquiry.

In action research knowledge is a living evolving process of coming to know rooted in everyday experience; it is a verb rather than a noun. This means action research cannot be defined in terms of hard and fast methods but is in Lyotard’s (1979) sense, a work of art. (Reason and Bradbury: 1)

I am attracted to the idea of knowledge as a verb, and to the first person methodologies that flow from such a way of seeing research. This quality in first person inquiry is captured by Torbert when he writes of a life that “aspires towards a continual living inquiry” supported by disciplines of

attention that “enable each of us to discover our own capacity for an attention supple enough to catch, at any moment, glimpses of its own fickleness.” (Torbert: 2001). The notion of “fickleness” reflects for me the other side of working with an emergent process. It speaks to the risks that my research will be deflected, or become incoherent, as a result of “fickle” attention. These risks speak to me of the need for a sustained purpose throughout the research journey, and they touch on an issue, which will emerge towards the end of the thesis particularly strongly, concerning my own sense of purpose and “truth”. I wonder if I am not damaging my relationships with others through “fickleness” in respect of my own purposes, and I ask how do I stand in my own truth?

Marshall also captures the transitional and evolving aspects of action research when she writes of “living life as inquiry”:

By living life as inquiry I mean a range of beliefs, strategies, and ways of behaving which encourage me to treat little as fixed, finished, clear-cut. Rather I have an image of living continually in process, adjusting, seeing what emerges, bringing things into question....” (Marshall, 1998: 156-157)

Again I notice how I am attracted to the processual nature of the inquiry process as described here. This statement might act as quality criteria for my own doctoral journey and for this thesis. Marshall and Torbert join other action research scholars in describing the essential characteristic needed to successfully live life as inquiry or engage in first person action research. This characteristic is the ability to critically observe oneself as an actor in the world and as an intending agent – it is commonly referred to as critical subjectivity<sup>2</sup> (Reason and Marshall: 113; Chandler and Torbert: 137; Varela and Sheer: 1). In this thesis I adopt the general strategy for achieving critical subjectivity, and accept that the kind of attention I need to “live life as inquiry” needs a double edge: I need to pay attention to the sources of my own intention, and also to the way I contact other people, things etc in the world. Marshall refers to this kind of double vision as bringing into play “inner” and “outer arcs of attention”. (Marshall, 1998: 157). As the doctoral journey progresses I become more guarded in speaking of an “inner world” as I engage with a more existential conception of being a person, but continue to be excited by the strong image of two arcs of attention sweeping back and forth. Reason and Torbert use a slightly different metaphor when they write of working “upstream” and working “down stream” (2001: 17-18). I like the way this image evokes a strong connection between the two aspects by suggesting they are part of the same stream of attention. It seems to me to open the way for a reciprocal relationship between the two aspects.

The thinkers quoted in the previous paragraph all emphasise the importance of attentional discipline and capability in furtherance of critical subjectivity. For example Marshall asserts that “Inquiry Requires Attentional

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<sup>2</sup> “Thus valid enquiry rests on critical subjectivity, on the personal view from a distance.” (Reason and Marshall: 113)

Disciplines” (2001: 433) whilst I have already quoted Torbert’s reference to “supple” attention. The literature on qualitative inquiry also emphasise the richness and potentiality of the in the moment experience of the researcher (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 4-6). The focus on attention also resonates with my Gestalt heritage. Gestalt therapy focuses on the therapeutic power of attention (Polster, 1999: 202-218; Parlett, 2001: 43-64). This is largely due to an existential action focused approach, which stresses that the present moment is the place from which change and healing becomes possible. Focus on attention to the present moment also leads to the development of an approach to change based on the belief that “change occurs when one becomes what he is, not when he tries to become that what he is not” (Beisser, 1970: 4). In this thesis I return to a refreshed engagement with attentional discipline and the implications for change in my own life. Partly this reinvigoration occurs as a consequence of my engagement with writing as a mode of first person action inquiry as I will show shortly.

## 0.2. First, second and third person aspects of action research

An aspect of action research that differentiates it from most artistic endeavour (the quotation from Bradbury and Reason with which I introduced the previous section refers to “work of art”) is its commitment to more deliberate and ambitious strategies for reaching out from the particular to the general (van Manen, 1990: 19). Whereas a poet or a painter may well object to any attempts to draw general lessons from their work, an action researcher lives in the hope that knowing for me might also be knowing for others with whom they are in personal contact, and for wider communities:

A wider purpose of action research is to contribute through this practical knowledge to the increased well-being – economic, political, psychological, spiritual – of human persons and communities, and so to a more equitable and sustainable relationship with the wider ecology of the planet of which we are an intrinsic part (Bradbury and Reason: 2).

The struggle to make connections between the specifically personal and the generally applicable in a quality way is a central theme in my action research. One of my most important quality goals is to make these kinds of connections in a careful, aware way. *How exactly* can my own experience found more general claims? *In what ways* may the documentation of my life world be of interest to you, or to others?

One way action research opens consideration of this question is by considering different *dimensions of purpose* for action research. Who is the research for? Is it primarily to improve an aspect of my own life? Do I aim for it to be useful for other people in a community of which I am a part? What about more generally – will my research aim to be of interest to those in the wider world – such as the wider action research world for example?

All good research is *for me*, *for us* and *for them*: it speaks to three audiences, and contributes to each of these three areas of knowing. It is *for them* to the extent that it produces some kind of generalizable ideas and outcomes which elicit the response ‘That’s interesting!’ from those who are concerned to understand a similar field (Davis, 1971)<sup>3</sup>. It is *for us* to the extent that it responds to concerns of our praxis, is relevant and timely, and so produces the response “that works!” from those who are struggling with problems in their field of action. It is *for me* to the extent that the process and outcomes respond directly to the individual researcher’s being-in –the –world, and so elicits the response, ‘That’s exciting!’ – taking exciting back to its root meaning, to set in action. (Reason and Marshall: 112-113)

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<sup>3</sup> Where authors I quote include reference to others who I don’t refer to directly in the thesis I include the reference to their work in a footnote rather than in my bibliography. In this case the reference is to Davis, M. 1964. That’s Interesting! Towards a phenomenology of sociology and a sociology of phenomenology. *Journal of Philosophy and Social Sciences*. 1(4), 304-344.



When the distinction into first second and third person inquiry is made all these thinkers make the point that the parts created by such distinctions need to be integrated or kept in balance. Reason and Marshall for example regard it as “unfortunate or degenerate” if any of the three aspects of inquiry “becomes dominant and overwhelms either one or both of the others.” (Marshall and Reason: 113). Torbert sets himself the challenge of inquiring into “*how to integrate* third person scientific research and institutional practice with first and second-person research and practice.” (Torbert, 1998: 223). The European-American Collaborative Challenging Whiteness, six scholar practitioners inquiring into the impact of white supremacist consciousness, also conclude that “first person inquiry is not enough”. They explore the ways second person inquiry supports, deepens and enhances first-person inquiry when an emotionally laden identity issue is at stake. (The European American Collaborative etc, 2005: 245-250).

This thesis relates strongly, but ambiguously, to the theme of integrating the different “persons” within my research. I’m drawn to the connection Reason and Marshall make between “exciting” and “set in action”, as this confirms for me my commitment to a first person inquiry. Yet, the thesis also discloses a pattern to the doctoral journey as it relates to second person inquiry. Chapter Three evolves around a confused withdrawal from contact with others in my supervision group that occurred in mid 2002. In the wake of this turbulence, I became cautious about second person inquiry in the supervision group and elsewhere. My heart is not in it. At the time it’s not clear how much this caution/lack of heart is to do with tensions and structural issues in the supervision group, but, with time, these uncertainties fade in significance. From the perspective of writing the thesis in 2006/7 what is more important is the *choice I make to withdraw*. With hindsight my withdrawal in mid 2002 seems based on an intuition that I needed to pull back from contact, although this is not expressly articulated. It is as if I take some distance from my relationships in order to look more deeply at the structure of my connectedness<sup>4</sup>. In this sense the PhD journey is a movement towards a quiet centre in my life. I am still consulting, still working with all the family issues that arise, but the PhD provides another place from which all this might be reflected upon.

This is not the whole picture. It’s an over simplistic presentation of the emphasis on first person inquiry. During the journey from 2001 to 2006 I also engage in second and third person practices. I join a community of family and organisational “constellators” (explained more fully in Chapter Five) with whom I examine fundamental issues in my family; I help set up a men’s group during 2006; and, throughout the journey, I’m involved in regular group supervision of my consulting work. I am also heavily engaged in process consulting as the cases on which I report in the thesis show. In

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<sup>4</sup> I wonder now if I should not have submitted to this energy more completely and manufactured some form of retreat. Life though had me in its grip and it did not occur to me.

addition I present papers at international conferences of Gestalt and action research practitioners, publish articles within my Gestalt community, and review an article for the journal *Action Research*. Yet there is a sense in which this is all background to the first person inquiry journey. I am in a sense *for* others more than I am inquiring *with* them. The ways in which I have become smooth and accomplished with others, through my years in process consulting work is an important part of what comes to trouble me during the doctoral journey. I feel that I am blocking my human connection through a paradoxical mix of selflessness and self-indulgence. As a result I surmise that I am deflected from both standing in my own truth or making healthy contact with others. My effort is to heal myself by looking to the structure of my belonging and my presence to others. Despite my sophisticated ways of relating I become a *novice* and set out to discover what it takes to be ready to enter into a genuinely inquiring stance with others.

As I mentioned in the first part of this Introduction my search for healing is inspired by my engagement with phenomenology, through which I gain a refreshed contact with my Gestalt heritage, and more generally start to re-configure my concept of self more existentially and less introspectively: how do I belong? How do I participate in the world? The intellectual restructuring gradually leaks into my way of existing as 2005 falls into 2006. The year of 2006 is a terrible one in some ways. I'm struggling with the reality of my daughter's cancer, trying to help, but also trying to cope with dispossessive forces of grief, helplessness, and love. But the year also sees me moving to contact my daughter and my sons in a different way, and what starts here begins to leak into the rest of my life. There is no completion – I am arguing for beginnings and wisps – for the emergence of new and differently structured questions, as something bulky in my existence moves, settles. I genuinely have no grand claims to make about this journey, but I will show you a commitment to the journey, and I will show you a changed way of thinking, which evokes the beginnings of a new way for me to live.

Part of the process to heal myself takes place through a *new way to express myself* in writing. This turns out to be fundamental: to preoccupy the first half of the thesis, and to remain significant throughout. I wish now to address the question, how did writing become such an important support to my first person inquiry?

### 0.3. Writing as Inquiry

The activity stream in this thesis is enabled, and brought to life, through being described in writing. Written accounts provide the basis of the claim to document my life; this documentation is a source of primary research material. On the journey I discover that writing lies close to experiencing and to thinking. The thesis re creates the significance of writing to my research; particularly the discovery of writing as something new and refreshing in my life. Chapter One addresses what I was learning about the method of writing as inquiry. Chapter Two describes how writing intruded into my life. Never in my life had I written so much, or so deeply as on this programme. An aspect of my engagement with the journey and in particular my engagement with phenomenology is to gain increased insight into the power of description.

My writing is multi-layered. In temporal terms the first layer is a series of thirty-three papers that were written (and in some cases re-written over a series of crafting cycles), describing aspects of my professional and private life (Appendix). The second layer consists of the conversations that happened around these written productions as they were shared with others, including, especially, members of my supervision group at CARPP. The third layer consists of the private reflections of myself as I have revisited the first two layers in the preparation of this thesis.

Entering this doctoral programme has been a substantial commitment. In some ways I have experienced it as entering a new world. One that is different in important respects from the world in which I have made my life before CARPP. One of the most significant differences has been the importance I have placed on the written word. I have come to exist as a doctoral student, largely through my written production. My commitment to writing can be shown most clearly through the way I have approached doctoral supervision. The supervisory process on a part time programme such as this one became of paramount importance to me. It is what brought me physically to the University from my home sixty miles away, and it was the occasion to meet with my supervisor<sup>5</sup> and the other five or six<sup>6</sup> students in my supervisory group. Before each of these supervisory sessions I would

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<sup>5</sup> Professor Judi Marshall that is, my supervisor. I will not solve the riddle (I feel it as one anyway) of how to address her throughout the thesis. Sometimes – most times I think – I’m drawn to write “Judi” as this first person naming captures the connection that has arisen over six years and more of travelling along this doctoral journey. Other times I lapse into what might be described as a more second person mode of address of “Supervisor” when I think of her as the person who leads the CARPP 6 supervisory group. Other times I use the third person mode of “Professor” or “Marshall”. My problem with mode of address indicates a fruitful confusion of relationship and role. She has been all these things to me, and I have a hard time neatly differentiating aspects of our relationship.

<sup>6</sup> The numbers have varied throughout the programme, which I will explain in more detail later in the thesis.

almost invariably submit a paper, which I would receive back from my supervisor, and some fellow students, annotated with their observations, comments and questions. My writing would then form the starting point for a discussion when it became my turn in the group to be in focus. This conversation would be recorded, and I would leave the supervision with annotated copies of my paper, plus a recording of the conversation that had occurred in my session. Writing is of course an important part of any doctoral student's engagement with the University, but, in my group, I was the one who most consistently established it as an essential discipline of my doctoral journey. My attention to writing also showed through in having two articles published during the journey: one at the very beginning to mark my entry on the programme (and probably help to reinforce the significance of writing for me), and one at the end to add an unintended symmetry to the journey (Farrands, 2001, 2007). These articles and the other main texts I have produced on the doctoral journey are listed at Appendix A.

As a result of how I took to writing on the programme I can say that becoming a doctoral student has been synonymous with becoming a writer. How, though, does this mark a distinction – surely writing has always been a part of my life? To some extent this is true, but as I have taken up my life within CARPP, I have begun to see the part that writing plays in my life differently: to see distinctions and differences between my life as a writer before and after CARPP. One aspect of my professional life that is thrown into relief by the doctoral programme is the extent to which it has evolved around the spoken rather than the written word. Ever since September 1996 I have made my living as a self employed Organisation Consultant, working in large systems – usually commercial corporations, but occasionally public sector organisations such as the National Health Service. My work is typically to do with how people speak with each other, whether it is in groups, or one to one in more personal, reflective conversations with managers. Who speaks when? Who doesn't get to speak? What is the quality of inquiry and listening like? How effective are our meetings? How do we best assimilate new technologies into our processes of meeting? These would be the kinds of questions that most arise in my work. Moreover, I tend to address such questions face to face with my clients, engaging them in discussion, and setting up frames for conversation to best take place. For example I have just returned (15<sup>th</sup> April 2007) from Uralsk where I have been working with a management team of a joint Anglo/Italian/Kazak venture managing a large high-pressure gas field. Another consultant and I have worked with thirty managers over two days, and have framed the two days in terms of *slowing* down to have the conversations about *how* they work together, which they don't normally have time for. This was our second meeting. The first was in St Petersburg in December 2006. On both occasions the focus was on conversational skills across functional and cultural boundaries, and with creating small strategic oversight groups that would provide an opportunity to engage differently, and to see the business differently. This is typical. *From the perspective of the work I do* these corporations appear as oral cultures where the main focus is on meeting together.

It is not the whole picture of my professional life (nor of managers working in corporations either). I do write. However, it is noticeable, in the light of the writing I have done on the doctoral programme, how different my professional writing has been. When I have written for a Corporate client the emphasis has usually been on writing to support an oral presentation, perhaps using “Powerpoint” presentational software, or I have been engaged in the conversational exchanges that typify most e-mail traffic. The bias towards conversation rather than writing is one of the ways in which my current professional life connects to my first professional practice as a barrister, where the important training and practice was in public advocacy, and certain kinds of inquiry (cross examination for example). As a young barrister I found myself performing in a courtroom which provided the setting for a stylised conversation in which the written word or even the legal rules were subordinated to a public disagreement over facts and their meaning. As a junior barrister I would be given cases where the law was highly unlikely to be in contention: what would be at issue would be what happened. It is not that barristers do not write, but that their writing is generally subordinated to their speaking. For example I would take free hand notes of evidence in a notebook, and use these notes to prepare for cross-examination. As a result of the doctoral programme I have returned to the habit of keeping a notebook, which has become a close companion – I am writing now from notes prepared in my notebook.

A specialisation in labour law, allied to a series of other life choices, led me into a more practical engagement with industrial relations in a large car firm where, if anything, the emphasis on conversation and disputation was greater than in a courtroom. The situation in which I found myself was one where the formal processes had, to a large extent, broken down so that I was frequently engaged with an aggressive management, and a belligerent shop steward movement, in disputes about what the rules should be concerning entering into and sustaining conversation<sup>7</sup>. The emphasis on the spoken word continued as a feature of my life when later on I trained to be an organisation consultant in the hands of teachers steeped in the active existential values of Gestalt Therapy. In this tradition the conversational moments, particularly those occurring between therapist and client, are the most important ones, and writing is generally associated with conceptualisation<sup>8</sup> and treated with suspicion. My purpose in referencing these historic moments in my life is to emphasise a continuity of interest in not only the spoken word, but speech in interactive settings such as a court

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<sup>7</sup> Part of my role was actually to write down more of the rules in terms of procedural understandings about how and when to negotiate. I also continued my note taking into the negotiations in which I was involved, mostly because I was working in disputatious situations, where recollections about who said what would often be contested.

<sup>8</sup> The connection between writing and thinking is one I explore in the next Chapter of the thesis. I also explore in greater depth the way my exposure to Gestalt Therapy has influenced my doctoral themes.

room, a therapeutic consulting room, or a meeting with working people, where speech becomes a conversation in some form, and where disputation, differences of view, are the currency of contact. This conversational bias stands out for me now in the light of how I took up the doctoral programme as one where the main mode of expression would be in writing. Why did I make such a change of emphasis?

The best response I can make to this question is that I made a number of relatively minor choices at the beginning of the programme that interacted to create a significant association between my doctoral research and writing. Immediately prior to commencing the programme I had an article published in a Gestalt Journal (*ibid*) – my first ever piece of published writing. I had been pleased with how the piece had been received in the Gestalt community. I had also noticed how the written form had helped me to be thoughtful about my consulting work; writing kind of distanced me from my own actions and gave rise to insights and questions about what I was doing in the reported case. (Extracts from this article and some of the questions it raised are introduced at the beginning of Chapter Two in this thesis). Furthermore this piece of writing had been the subject of an e-mail by Peter Reason to the CARPP research community, recommending it – I felt a bit proud. Then when the piece was introduced into my supervisory group in March 2001 I found that it induced interesting commentaries from my doctoral colleagues and my supervisor. Most importantly, I noticed how the commentaries and questions revealed aspects of my style that were not apparent to me at the time of doing the work, or when I wrote the article. Quite quickly I widened the subject matter of my writing to include more and more of my private life, and found that I was excited by the act of expression, and then by the responses I was getting. This was compounded in 2003 when writing played a significant part in how I was deliberately trying to present my self to my supervision group. Events reflected on each other to create a momentum behind my association between writing and my doctoral research.

This effect was compounded as I began to read about writing. This produced a fruitful reciprocation between my writing practice and reading about how others had used their writing. The overall effect of the interaction between my writing and my reading was to reinforce the idea that as I wrote so I explored. This made me both more attentive to what and how I wrote, as well as more resolved to not constrain the writing too much – to try to follow the ‘pen’ as well as guide it. I also felt encouraged to continue to write personally in the confidence that purpose would emerge, or clarify, out of the process of writing. For example, I read Bill Torbert’s book “The Power of Balance” (1991), including the slightly stunned foreword by Donald Schon concerning the way Torbert had mixed his private, academic and working life, and I felt strengthened to be even braver in the exploration of my personal life in my public writing. From Torbert I went on to read the notebooks of Rilke (1949) and Camus (1963), particularly noticing the way they took their own personal experience as the occasion for reflecting on fundamental issues for us all. I fancied a connection here between Torbert,

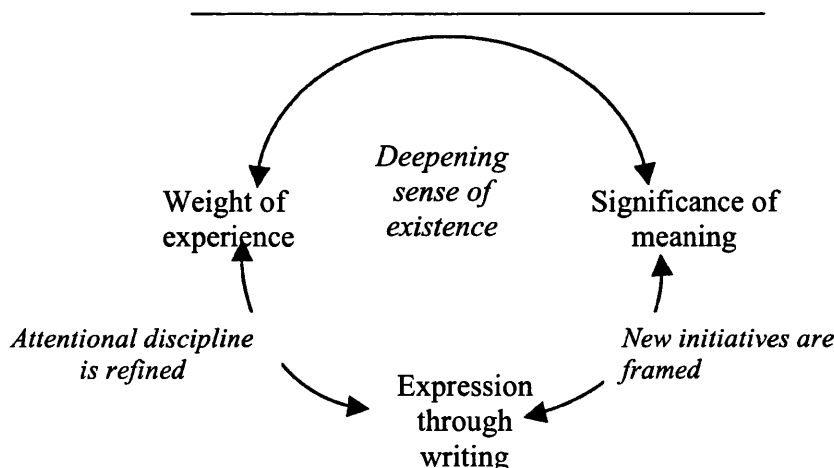
Rilke and Camus. I also re-read Saint Exupery who I had first encountered as a schoolboy, and noticed how he seemed to blur the line between fiction and journalism: I asked did all these things happen to him just like this, and does it matter? (I quote him at some length in Chapter Four). These writers provided me with a growing understanding of what it might mean to richly document a life world by relying on good first person accounts to provide a *felt sense* of what it was like to live in their world. I went on to explore the creative potential of the written word through Laurel Richardson's work on qualitative research processes and writing (Richardson and St Pierre, 2001; Richardson, 1997; Stewart, 1996)); this interlaced with the doctoral supervision as, from the autumn of 2004, we started to include free form writing sessions in our meetings. These readings, and the actual practice of doing so much more writing than I had ever done before, over such an extended period, further raised my awareness to the potential for writing to be revelatory of both my own thought (Weick, 1995; 2001; Merleau-Ponty, 1973) and my own experience (Depraz, Varela and Vermersch, 2003; Manen, 1990; Czarniawska, 1997). In fact the dividing line between writing and thinking and writing and experiencing progressively blurred as the doctoral journey unfolded. These insights fed back into the way I interrogated my own texts when I came to present a paper to the EGOS conference in July 2006, and began to write the thesis based on an examination of my own written production.

Reading about writing as a stimulus to my own writing process has continued as I have written the thesis. The latest edition of the Qualitative Research Handbook (2005) dedicates more space than previous editions to writing. I have read with interest, and also a sense of confirmation and recognition, new chapters by Stewart and Brady (2005). I have also seen an advance copy of an article by Marshall, prepared for the forthcoming edition of the Handbook of Action Research (2007). Encountering these authors, and setting them alongside my sources in phenomenology and poetry, I have experienced a double pull. On the one hand I am encouraged to open up to my own descriptive potential, while, on the other, I am made aware of the need to be careful of the perspectival partiality of what I describe. Richardson writes that, "paradoxically we know more and doubt what we know" (2005: 963). As a result of this "double pull" I begin to experience both challenge and support from those who write about writing as inquiry. On the supportive side each author encourages me to open to the possibilities inherent in the process of writing. For example Stewart works with the idea that writing might "grope towards embedded affective experience as it tries to cull attention to moments of legibility and emergence" (Stewart, 1037): this affirms me in my own process of describing in writing my actual experiences. Brady introduces an emphasis on *place* for human existence, writing of "self conscious knowledge of being in place" (981): I feel retrospectively supported in the attention I give to place and human constellations during 2005. Marshall advocates "congruence of form and content" (2007, in press): I feel confirmed (again) in experimenting with my own form, including poetry, where it resolves issues within the writing. However, as I have said, I am also challenged by

what I see as a second moment in the writing process: to be careful of the constituting force of language; of the “discursive struggles” that take place within the frame of individual writing where what is at stake is “identity and re making memory.” (Richardson, 2005: 962). I feel this caution with particular force as a white middle-aged European man. The messages about the potentially dangerous correlations between power and descriptive capacity seem particularly relevant to me, and I take them to heart. (Denzin, 2005: 944; Bishop, 2005: 110). One theme for this thesis is how I reconcile the moments of description, and critical subjectivity that are opened to me by these authors.

On the doctoral journey I have come to experience writing as a *tool for distancing myself from myself, and for getting closer to myself*. As I have immersed myself in my writing, particularly when the writing has been flowing along, as if ‘under its own steam’, I have felt something like a mode of entrancement. It can be as if I am being written in some way. Before the doctoral journey I would have said that writing was an attempt to transcribe a thought or an experience. Now I would not describe the process like that, but as something nearer to co-emergence of writing, thinking and experiencing. My experience is given weight and presence through being described and in this process of description I refine my attentional disciplines. Writing also oversees the advent of meaning and frames the whole conceptualisation of experience. In this sense writing plays its part in another key dynamic of the thesis. My commitment to writing as a mode of inquiry is present from the very beginning of the doctoral journey. Arguably this commitment readies me for my encounter with phenomenology two years after I begin the programme. Phenomenology reinforces the significance of writing and clarifies its meaning for me as an action

EXHIBIT 0.3: Writing, experience and meaning



researcher.

In Chapter One I introduce the techniques I have used in the writing to emphasise the potential of my writing to support inquiry. The most significant point is more of an attitude than a technique. I have learned to



open myself to the potential for emergence within the writing: to try to suppress my editorial “I” and allow the writing to flow. One way this finds specific expression is in my readiness to lift my head and describe where I am and what is happening at any moment. Following Kathleen Stewart I see this as a process of seeking the point where meaning emerges, and tracking the trace it leaves (2005: 1028). I support this emergence by then being careful with any subsequent editing. I ask myself whether refinement of this particular group of words is necessary and whether it will hide the meaning as it originally arose, and to what effect. This inclination to edit lightly is roughly correlated to the time since the piece was written. If I notice mistakes in the sentence I just wrote I go back and change it without thinking. If I notice something odd when I re-read the material when the particular piece is finished then I am conscious of making a choice to either craft it into better, or more appropriate expression, or comment on what I have noticed. I have made it an invariable rule to not go back and change material once it has been submitted to supervision – I treat it as if it were an article written by someone else. As you will see in the thesis this gives me the opportunity to layer my own text with fresh commentary.

From 2004 onwards I supported the idea that I could separate from my text with the image, borrowed from Mauro Carbone (2004: 47), that my writing was a bowl or hollow within which words and ideas could appear to turn before my gaze. I picture my writing as a closely woven fabric within which things can be inquired into. When a word or concept is brought to attention I picture it settling onto the fabric and causing a depression, bowl or hollow to appear, which gently holds the word or concept. In this way I like to get some distance on something that might not be seen in all its potential because of being too close. I provide several examples of reflecting on words/ideas like this in Chapter four of the thesis. As well as standing back I may also deliberately immerse myself in a word or phrase taking it on as if it were a new sense like seeing or hearing. Think of a blind man’s stick as a kind of prosthetic eye and then think of a word as a way of feeling out the world. For example I discover a new word (for me), “oneiric”, and it makes more definitive sense of my creative early morning experiences when I’m half awake. As a result of engaging with the word I appreciate this time of my day more fully. I provide myself with pen and paper, a discrete bedside light (so as not to disturb Bridget too much), and a small writing table, to support writing in bed in the early morning. This example illustrates one of the ways in which writing has also been taken into my life, and shifted my way of living. In Chapter Two I describe how I developed rituals and practices around writing, which have the effect of incorporating writing much more fully into my overall existence. Becoming a writer in a particular way is a part of becoming a doctoral student. It is a way of living that is taken on and taken in.

#### 0.4. Maurice Merleau-Ponty....and significant others

The French phenomenologist and philosopher of the body Merleau-Ponty is an influential presence through out the thesis so I would like to introduce him here in this Introduction, and say something about the ways in which he has influenced me. He is someone who I discover in August 2003 when I hear a speaker discussing his work at a *Roots of Gestalt* conference in Paris. The connection between his work and that of the Gestalt psychologists becomes an abiding intellectual stimulus for the thesis. One thing this thesis shows is a developing and deepening commitment to the works of one philosopher in particular. I take on the cloak of his thought and see the world through the perspective of his world-view. In a sense he becomes a guide for me, reintroducing me to my body and to my carnal existence. It is a little ironic that it should take a thinker to show me these things. I don't pretend to exactly know how this works; however it feels as though it is involved with my move to take up writing more fully as part of a doctoral journey. I could have chosen other routes for development at this stage of my life, but I chose one that involved me in writing and thinking. It is as if I understood that some aspect of fundamentally re-shaping the structure of my conception of life was needed. My chosen entry into attempted healing and development is through the gate of thought. I choose a philosopher as a companion and I seek to think with him. As I accompany him I find that I am also drawn to him and his companions as human beings as well as thinkers. They carried their thought into the world underpinned by an apparently deep belief that how they lived and related their personal lives was of significance. I came to admire their commitment to their own truth and the integrity they showed about this. Merleau-Ponty comes to provide me with a beacon of engaged truthfulness.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty was borne on March 14<sup>th</sup> 1908, one of three children. He was raised by his mother his father having been killed in combat in 1913. Despite his loss Jean Paul Sartre reports him as saying that he had "never recovered from an incomparable childhood" (Stewart, 1998: 566). Sartre explains this remark in terms of the influence that his childhood was to have on the development of his thought:

Seeking the golden age, and with that as his point of departure, he forged his myths and what he has since called his "style of life". It established his preferences – choosing, at the same time, the traditions which recalled the rituals of childhood, and the "spontaneity" which evoked childhoods superintendent liberty." (Sartre writing in 'Merleau-Ponty Vivant' as quoted by Stewart *ibid*).

I am attracted by the deep sense of being situated in the world that invests all of Merleau-Ponty's work. He seems to *move from* a deep sense of being situated out into the marginal world of existence. As such he has provided me with a basis for re-thinking my own connection to the world including my relationships with other people. I have also been drawn to contrast my own peripatetic childhood, disconnected from my own family of origin by

breaks at boarding school, and living with my grandmother. I have wondered if and how my own start in life has contributed to my own skilful working of marginality, and need for connectedness.

As with his father, Merleau-Ponty's life was also interrupted by war, although with less tragic consequences: he was captured in the French retreat in 1940, tortured<sup>9</sup>, and discharged in September 1940, whereupon he returned to Paris to eventually join the same resistance movement, *Socialism and Liberty*, as Sartre. These bare facts are difficult to illuminate further as he appears to have written or spoken very little about this period apart from a few generally dismissive remarks about the resistance group they were in (along the lines of all talk and no action!<sup>10</sup>). I wonder what it was like for him to have fought the Germans when so much of his professional life was concerned with German philosophy and culture. I also wonder if his indirect experience of war (the death of his father), allied to his own experience, might have contributed towards a dialectical philosophy that seeks to tread a path between various kinds of fundamentalism. His own deepest positions emerge from the refutation of opposites and the synergy he finds from this double critique (Carmen and Hansen, 2005: 4-5). His stance resonates with me at an emotional level and intrigues me intellectually. The emotional connection stems from something I recognised in my own life position: a kind of horror of violence and extreme positions. In part this arises, I'm sure, from three difficult and influential years in my 30's when working as the Industrial Relations Manager of two large British car manufacturing plants; also from my training in the principles of communicative rationality that underpin the life experience of the professional advocate. Intellectually I find myself pulled on, despite the difficulty of engaging with some of his texts<sup>11</sup> and the effort needed to try to join the wider debate within which he is offering his contribution. I can imagine that my introduction to his philosophy and more generally to phenomenology will be one of the most lasting contributions to my life from this doctoral programme.

After the cessation of war in 1945 Merleau-Ponty threw himself into life as an engaged academic founding the journal *Les Temps Modern* with Sartre, and engaging in the turbulent politics of post war France<sup>12</sup>. Their complex

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<sup>9</sup> The claim is made in Stephen Priest (Priest: 4)

<sup>10</sup> Sartre describes it thus: "Borne of enthusiasm, our little group caught a fever and died a year later, of not knowing what to do." (Stewart: 567)

<sup>11</sup> Not just my view. : "His arguments are not systemically organised; his prose is often lush, occasionally hyperbolic; and he delivers few memorable bon mots or resonant slogans by which to identify and recall his considered views." (Carmen and Hansen: 4)

<sup>12</sup> Moreover they [Sartre, Merleau-Ponty] lived during one of the most volatile epochs in European history, which included the Russian and Chinese Revolutions,

relationship was to include strong intellectual disagreements particularly (as related to this thesis) in respect of the relationship of the self to the world. Sartre developed the idea that humanity was blessed and burdened with absolute freedom. This was a feature of humanity's ability to step away from an otherwise totally determined world, and to empty consciousness into a state of translucent oversight. In this situation human beings could always make a choice, and could only have recourse to causes (whether outside themselves in the world or inside themselves such as with aspects of their psychology – perhaps arising from aspects of their history) by being in "bad faith". Sartre considered that thought freed humanity from being a causally driven object like all other objects in the world. In contrast Merleau-Ponty described a vision of the self that was haunted by its life to date in the form of embodied, habitual ways of going on. As far as Merleau-Ponty was concerned our habitual selves could not be free in the way that Sartre argued, because they were founded on our historic existence in a social and natural world, *which was incorporated into our self hood*. The importance for the thesis is that these different perspectives generate contrasting notions of how we are free, and what exactly it means for human beings to be part of a culture, and a historic tradition. Where I stand in relation to them is relevant to where I inquire when I ask where I might find sources of energy and inspiration; and where I come eventually to stand is with Merleau-Ponty, looking over my shoulder as I step forward.

I have spoken of Merleau-Ponty's connection to Gestalt? How did this connection arise? The Gestalt theorist Aaron Gurwitsch can be of help here, because he not only provides an insight into Merleau-Ponty's contact with Gestalt, but also opens up other interesting connections. Gurwitsch worked closely with Husserl in Freiburg until the Nazis came to power in 1933 when he fled to Paris to spend seven years lecturing on the confluence of Gestalt psychology and Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty attended Gurwitsch's Paris lectures, and these influenced his own dissertation of 1938, produced in 1942 as his first book *The Structure of Behavior* ("Structure" is the word commonly used when "Gestalt" is translated into French.). His second book *Phenomenology of Perception* (published 1945) continued to explore the implications of the work of the Gestalt Psychologists directly referencing the cases of surgeon Kurt Goldstein<sup>13</sup>, and throughout the rest of his works Gestalt theory re-appears,

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the two World Wars as well as the Korean, Vietnam and Algerian conflicts (Stewart, 1995: xiii).

<sup>13</sup> Kurt Goldstein was a German-Jewish physician and psychiatrist. He received his medical degree from the University of Breslau in 1903. He taught at the Universities of Frankfurt, Berlin, Columbia, Harvard and Brandeis and practiced neurological and psychiatric medicine in hospitals in Europe and the United States. His assistant was the Gestalt theorist Adhemar Gelb. The case studies Merleau-Ponty relies upon are often the experiences of the patient Schneider, a German soldier who was injured in battle by a shell splinter in the brain. The injury had left him in a position startlingly similar to a caricature of a cognitive (intellectualist) model of a man. He could only perform certain abstract bodily functions by thinking them through like an automaton. When asked to raise his right hand to his head he could do so by thinking through the necessary bodily movements of arm and hand, and by engaging his left hand to then

providing a continuing source of inspiration.

Gurwitsch fled France in 1940 and by 1948 he was lecturing at Brandeis University and living in Cambridge in Boston where, in 1955, he met the American scholar Samuel Todes, who had already made a Gestalt connection when, as a Psychology undergraduate, he was taught by Wolfgang Kohler at Swarthmore College. In 1955 Todes was doing graduate work at Harvard, and teaching philosophy at MIT. Gurwitsch and Todes had weekly meetings “centered on their mutual interest in the Gestalt theory of perception and its relevance to phenomenology,” (Todes: xii). Todes presented his doctoral dissertation *The Human Body as Material Subject of the World* in 1963 two years after Merleau-Ponty’s death on the 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1961<sup>14</sup>: Gurwitsch, and Todes both feature in this thesis. Through these kind of connections Merleau-Ponty not only takes me forward into the new territory (for me) of phenomenology, but also helps me to re-think my understanding of Gestalt. It is congruent with his thought that in my engagement I should both travel back to an important aspect of my past, and also forward into contact with new territory.

#### *My connection to Gestalt*

My personal engagement with Gestalt is a double one. Through Merleau-Ponty I travel back to inquire into the work and lives of the pre-war Gestalt psychologists who made such a contribution to German intellectual life in the 1920s and 1930s (Ash, 1998). This particularly takes me to their insights about Gestalt form, and how these correlated to phenomenological thought about perception. I explain the Gestalt understanding about figure and ground more fully in Chapter Three; suffice it for now to know that what especially impressed Gurwitsch and then Merleau-Ponty was the observations of the psychologists that something (a figure) always appeared with something else (the ground). The totality or whole was made up of this “gestalt” of a figure against a ground. Merleau-Ponty takes this as an abiding metaphor for his own thought, and so do I, as I ask: what is in the background, still present and influential, but currently invisible? What hidden resources lie in my own ground? What mode of inquiry is

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help the right arm into position. However if asked to assume the attitude of a soldier and salute then he could perform that action straight away. In other words, according to Merleau-Ponty, if he deliberately stepped into the form of life of being a soldier than his body could move itself, but while the behaviour remained at the abstract, level then he could only behave like a cognitivist robot. The injury had interrupted his body’s ability to move itself without thought. The disfunction had exposed the magic of normal embodied functioning.

<sup>14</sup> Todes died in 1994. His thesis was not published until 2001 as “Body and World”. In the introduction to this book Hubert Dreyfus says for a work that offers a detailed account of situated knowledge this book seems strangely desituated. There is no clue that it was conceived almost half a century ago in Cambridge, Massachusetts...Yet his text...enters the current philosophical debates concerning realism/anti realism and the nature of non conceptual perceptual content and its relation to thought.” (Todes, 2001: xi)

appropriate to discover this knowledge? These questions arise from my return to Gestalt under Merleau-Ponty's guidance. They are different questions from the ones that arise for me from my training in Gestalt therapy during the late 1980s and 1990s.

I was trained in a post Second World War tradition of Gestalt by teachers such as Edwin and Sonia Nevis (Nevis, 1997) and Malcolm Parlett (Parlett, 2001), who had helped develop an existential therapy around Gestalt principles such as figure/ground. Edwin and Sonia connect back to the story I was telling earlier in this section of the network of connectedness. They were both trained by Fritz and Laura Perls (Perls, 1947)<sup>15</sup>, and Fritz was a young laboratory assistant to Kurt Goldstein in the 1930s. Although my Gestalt training has included some therapy training (for example I was trained in couples and family therapy in 1994-95) I have never practiced as a therapist. What I have taken in particular is a focus on paying attention to the present moment (I say more about the Gestalt roots of this in Chapters Three and Four). Out of the rich teaching, what may be summarised as sedimenting out for me can be captured in two injunctions given to me by Sonia Nevis. The first is when she observed me stuck with what to do next in a group. "You need never be stuck Rob." she said, "Just say where you are!" My attempt to do this might characterise one aspect of my doctoral journey – where am I? the other injunction was offered to me when I was sitting in front of a simulated family on a training programme also wondering what to say next. The family were tearing themselves apart in front of my eyes in a fierce argument. Sonia, sitting just behind me as I watched in horror, lent forward. This time she whispered, "don't say anything until you can say what is wonderful about this family!" I weep at the simple beauty of it. Later, in May 2004, I joined Sonia on the faculty teaching these family therapy methods to organisation consultants. At the end of the programme I interviewed those on the programme, recording and transcribing the interviews. I was particularly interested in what sense they had made of Sonia's injunction to start by appreciating something "wonderful" in the systems with which they worked. I went back and spoke on the phone with Sonia about it. Her understanding of this as a place to start with a system was that it enhanced contact between the consultant and the 'system'. Here is part of an interview with another consultant and friend Lars Marmgren that illustrates the inquiry about contact and affirmation:

Rob: Because there is a – I mean – just to challenge slightly there is a tradition in Gestalt of sometimes being quite brusque. I mean the important thing is what comes to awareness, and if what comes to awareness is a negative then you say it, and you could say there is something rather forced about looking for the positive when what might be overwhelming you in your awareness is the badness. There is something forced for example about thinking of the positive things to do with the Iraq war for example. You might be thinking, "actually Rob that is so far away

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<sup>15</sup> Perls' first book is a critique of Freud: it is dedicated to the Gestalt psychologist Max Wertheimer

from the reality of my experience that what I want to tell you is not what is good about George Bush!"

Lars: (Laughs). That's true. I mean I think there is both sides of Gestalt. We had some reminiscence of it in the Scandinavian programme. The old west coast Gestalt provocative type of interventions where the accepting loving side was less apparent, but the teachers I had did not really come out of that – I mean the people I think of as role models.

Rob: It's interesting though because in academic circles, or when looking at science, what gets promoted is a critical mind. The notion of being able to critically analyse so that in any situation of looking at a scientific principle the rule really is that it can't be disconfirmed. So the pressure is to disconfirm or deconstruct – find the fault.

Lars: I think though there is one underlying Gestalt principle that I have been taught. That is – it was primarily based on individual therapy if you like, but you had to start by building contact and trust, and I think the basic idea behind looking at the good side is just another way of expressing that if you like. I mean...

Rob: Well, you said it was more before. You made a distinction – I mean with my help – between what is like a principle of process – of making contact in order to influence, but also you – I think, let me not put words into your mouth – but were you not also saying also that it is more than that. It is a deeper way when looking at human systems of coming to know them?

Lars: Yes. It depends what you put into the concept of making contact I would say. Maybe there is a mixture here of many different schools of thought, but I have a strong feeling that all the great therapists have always stated that when they do good work it is because they touch something in themselves. That is they learn something together with the client. Which is a way of saying: "don't you think you can go in there and believe that you can correct, because if you don't understand that there is some newness in there for you also you are just going to manipulate which isn't (indistinct)....."

Rob: Thank you, mm, mmm (Discussion with Lars Marmgren, 9<sup>th</sup> July 2004.)<sup>16</sup>

My own understanding, as it eventually settled, through my discussion with the other consultants, and with Sonia is that to work with a system it is helpful, necessary even, for the system to open for you, to show itself, and not to close up before your gaze. How do I help this system to open before me? Contact then becomes a kind of mutual opening based on a fundamental care, which can deepen into love. The idea that I might want to be in a relationship with other whereby it discloses itself to me (and I also open) goes deep into me, and surfaces repeatedly in this thesis, as I struggle

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<sup>16</sup> Lars has agreed to me quoting this in my thesis.

with my own narcissism, and its implications for truth and relationship. There is a lot more to Gestalt therapy than this, but, when all is said and done, it is for me contact and awareness. In the course of my doctoral journey I have asked again what these simple injunctions from Sonia might mean in my life.....and in the lives of other action researchers: “just say where you are!”, and “don’t speak until you can say something wonder-full about what you see!”

Also in the lives of my family: this thesis shows that the place where my intellectual re-frame starts first to sporadically break into the practice of my life is in my most intimate places. There is some intuition that this might be the case at the beginning of the doctoral journey when I start to describe my personal life, but it flowers into reality later in the journey as I struggle to re connect with what is closest to me.

### *My Family*

My family appears in this thesis from time to time so I would like to introduce them here. You will get to know them more fully as the thesis progresses. I have been married to Bridget since January 1973. We met in 1968 at Lancaster University, and since 1996 we have run a small organization consulting business from our home in Oxford, England. Bridget is trained as a Gestalt therapist and practiced as one before consulting. We occasionally work together, but have our own clients. We have three children. Our eldest child is Alice (borne July 1978), who is just about to submit the first draft of her doctoral thesis to University College London<sup>17</sup>. In December 2005 Alice was diagnosed with a rare cancer – for which she was treated with intense chemotherapy during 2006. Just before Christmas 2006 she was given a rest from treatment. She has a scan on April 24<sup>th</sup> 2007 to review the status of the cancer. We also have two sons, Tom (July 1980) and Joe (1984), who are just completing undergraduate courses. My father Robert (April, 1923), my mother Gwendoline (December 1927), and my father’s father Arthur (1896-1940), also appear in the thesis. I love them but come to wonder how I have loved.

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<sup>17</sup> “Interlocking Heresies: Ethics and Politics in the Regulation of Embryonic Stem Cell Research in the UK” (PhD thesis pending submission).



## 0.5. The shape of the thesis

In this section I want to make a short bridge between the Introduction and the first chapter of the thesis by summarising the content of the Introduction in terms of the shape of what will now follow.

As I have sought to pull together an account of the research journey into this thesis I have begun to appreciate what I only glimpsed as an idea before: precisely how much qualitative research is captured by metaphors of emergence and multiple perspective: researcher as quilt maker or jazz improviser (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 4-5). This appreciation has grown largely out of struggling with issues of continuity in the thesis, brought about by the multi-layered nature of the text. The thesis refers to the documentation of my existence as it was being described between March 2001 and mid 2006. This documentation is the basis for reflection as I “write up” the thesis between mid 2006 and April 2007. However this ‘writing up’ is also subject to reflection as well, as I seek to be consistent to my principles of writing as ongoing inquiry. The distinction between writing about what is occurring as I write the thesis, and what was occurring at some previous stage of the journey is not always easy to maintain. I support myself in maintaining continuity by structuring the thesis in a particular way. I divide it into five chapters, which are in principle set out in chronological order. Each chapter is then broken into a number of sections. The beginnings of each chapter and each section present an opportunity to position the section/chapter within the whole. This helps to maintain continuity particularly when moving between time frames such as when relating something that occurred in 2002 (for example) and connecting it to something occurring currently as I write the thesis. Continuity becomes of particular importance on those occasions when I seek to illuminate some aspect of experience from the doctoral journey through recourse to ideas that were gained later in time: when I ‘bring forward’ material in this way I explain what I am doing, usually at the beginning of the relevant section.

My way of writing constantly threatens the past with the present: what really happened in my problems with my supervision group (Chapter Three)? My answer to questions such as this is to seek to both honour the past, as a discrete moment with its own presence, and also to make it live again in my present experience. This double intention is held within the following chapter frame.

1. Chapter One, *Writing as an emergent process of inquiry* introduces the ways in which I have taken on writing as a research method. In it I discuss the connection between emergence and writing, how I support emergent form, and different aspects of quality as it effects my writing. This includes an account of how I presented learning about quality in research, gleaned from my own doctoral writing, to an international conference.

2. Chapter Two, *Writing as an aspect of lived existence*, approaches writing from a different angle – how has it been introduced into, and influenced my life? How can writing both describe and illuminate my life? This takes me into a description of rituals and practices of writing, how writing has disturbed my life, and writing authentically (or not) about feeling. This chapter includes extracts from a 2001 account of a consulting assignment with a large oil and gas company, which enables me to introduce questions concerning bewilderment and wonder.
3. Chapter Three, *Disconnection*, is built around a break down in my relationship with my supervision group which is initiated by a deliberate experiment in withdrawal that has far more profound effects than I bargained for. This prompts a deepening of my personal inquiry as I express in writing some very intimate aspects of my life. As I reflect on this in the second half of the chapter I explore different conceptions of myself that are more relationally based, and also explore entering another's intimate space through writing.
4. Chapter Four, *Re-thinking my situation in the world*, inquires into the way in which I am engaging with the works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and phenomenology more generally. This includes the way in which insights from phenomenology are feeding back to re-shape my understanding of my Gestalt heritage. In the second half of the chapter I attempt a synthesis of my understanding by relating it to the notion of experiential knowing in action research. I try to recreate in the chapter the sense of struggle that I experienced in 2004 as I sought to take in the ideas from phenomenology and make sense of them as a person and as a researcher. The Chapter includes the description of a consulting case in which I sought to apply ideas of closeness from a distance drawn from phenomenology. My failure to do this in a satisfactory way (for me) energises my entry in Chapter Five.
5. Chapter Five, *Conclusions and new questions*, is concerned with resolution and synthesis. What do I have to say about the original questions about energy and excitement in my life, and about the process of action research and the epistemological questions raised by the journeying? I continue to introduce accounts of my life but these are now directed towards closure rather than opening (there is a new consulting account and a description of my engagement with "Constellations" training). I draw out some dimensions of my move towards resolution but I do so in a freehand form drawn from my notebook to emphasise the provisional nature of my conclusions. I pose new, but now differently structured questions.

If I was to ambitiously visualise the whole of this thesis then I would take a balloon, and half fill it with water in that way that my children used to do when they had "water fights". This shape of distending towards the end is something of the overall effect I seek. I would like the reader to feel that the thesis gathers weight and bulk towards the end. I seek this quality.

## CHAPTER ONE: Writing as an emergent process of inquiry

### *Introduction*

In the Introduction I described how in some ways I was new to writing. This chapter describes how I make sense of this ‘newness’ in terms of writing as method and deliberate process.

The chapter considers methodological issues for the thesis, concerning writing as a form of ongoing inquiry. I describe how I have developed an approach to writing as inquiry across the whole of the doctoral journey arriving at a set of approaches which I am applying as I write this thesis. I ask, how might writing be an emergent process of inquiry? This question correlates to another, which also appears in this chapter, can writing be used to capture in the moment experience? These questions have a slightly paradoxical or naive quality in the sense that they seem to fly in the face of common sense: how can a process so subject to crafting and amendment be associated with emergence, and the present moment? In responding to this question I bring forward insights culled from my engagement with phenomenology, which occurs from mid 2003 onwards in the doctoral journey.

The chapter is divided into five sections.

- *Some questions about emergence and writing.* In this section I use my own difficulty in beginning to write this thesis to explore aspects of emergence as they have related to my experience of writing. Also to illustrate writing emergently.
- *Writing where I am.* How can I convincingly write about my present moments? This echoes an injunction from process consulting to always be ready to express current thoughts and feelings in service of the client.
- *Supporting emergent form.* How do I provide practical processes for enabling my writing to constitute a process of ongoing inquiry? This includes a description of how I track questions and review my own writing for latent meaning. These two processes are taken up in the following two parts
- *On taking a distance from my own text: reading as well as writing.* Here I explore further how to read one’s own and others texts. I explore the process of stepping back, and opening a gap between myself, and my own writing.
- *Developing quality criteria for my writing at the EGOS conference.* I describe a research process I used for preparing a paper to an EGOS conference, designed to impute implicit action research criteria from five years of doctoral writing.

I aim to write this chapter in a way that includes a balance of *showing* and *telling* in respect of my efforts to write emergently, so as to illustrate, as well as describe, the themes under discussion.

### 1.1. Some questions about emergence and writing

In this section I introduce the idea and the practice of trying to describe present experience in the context of a crafted document. The section introduces important aspects of trying to work emergently, such as the risk of lack of purpose, and the possibility of creating a fruitful gap between my writing and my self. I seek to write the section in a way that is compatible with its subject matter, by paying attention to what emerges as I write.

I started to write this thesis at the end of the EGOS conference in Bergen, Norway (July 2006). However, I found beginning a frustrating process, and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2006 I deliberately stood back from trying to write the thesis and created a new document. I focused directly on the problem at hand – my difficulty in beginning - and explored it by writing to myself. I experienced this as a calming process, which released me to eventually pick up the threads of this chapter again. In this new piece of writing I began by describing as directly as possible what was occurring as I wrote.

I begin to write, marking out with shapes that become words, and words that become sentences, a thought about a beginning, which hazily came to me as I crept from my bed, and attended to this familiar early morning vigil of scraping a pen across a page, or tap, tap, tapping at the keys of my laptop. What if I was to just start to write in the expectation that how I begin would reveal the direction I needed to take with the thesis? If I trusted what arose and worked with it, taking it seriously as a beginning?

As I write these first words I take possession of the thought which existed before now as a misty possibility, and it sharpens through expression here on the page. I also find that the articulation through this bodily process of writing-out a thought that arose from, or with, a feeling, works back to arouse my body with fresh feeling – a slight frustration melded with an anticipatory tingle in this case. Also that this awareness of my sensing body then arouses fresh thoughts such as the one I am having now as a question: how will my body's engagement here with this day, under this sky, effect what I will think and write? (Beginning Two, August 2006: 2)

Having begun in this way I then went on to explore the feeling I had of running out of momentum as I had made previous starts. It was not that I had not written a lot already, but that the writing seemed to lack sufficient direction for me to say what it was about and where it was going. This frustration echoed that from my previous attempts to start. This is how I described the problem as arising for me.

I have made several attempts to start writing this thesis. So far I have produced 34,000 words but no beginning! Each attempt at a beginning has led into a gush of writing that has gradually immersed itself deeper into one aspect of what I would like to say so that my attempts to introduce the whole in some way have slipped away from me. Direction seems to result from a series of consequential choices that carry me forward almost in spite of myself: almost as if the thesis is writing me rather than the other way around. Saying this produces a tingle of anxiety. After all as an action

researcher in the tradition in which I have been schooled I should be paying more attention to my choices and surely this should deliver me of more control should it not? Yet this “should” does not in the respect of this writing account for the whole of my experience – in fact, in relation to writing a beginning, it does not seem to account for very much of my experience at all. So let me return to that tingle: in what way is the thesis writing me? (Beginning Two, August, 2006: 3)

Following my inquiring nose in this way did lead me into interesting territory which I am confident will not be wasted, and in this way it is representative of other beginnings; however, in the end, it seemed to run out of steam and led me to feeling that I had explored, but that I still had not laid out the territory of the thesis in a substantial enough way. I had a feeling of treading water or running into sand – my energy was dissipating through the effort of keeping going, but without going any where in particular. On reflection both beginnings seemed to suffer from the same sense of insufficient direction: why should this be a persistent problem?

As I have thought about this I have come to realise my situation as being in part an ironic one. Both the beginnings illustrate my interest in how things emerge, and the relationship this has with inquiry: the first quoted extract does so directly by posing a question about emergence, and the other does so by demonstrating this interest through chasing after my “tingle” of feeling. Yet it is this interest that then sabotages my attempt to begin because each new moment offers yet another opportunity to start. To be continuously in the process of attending to the present moment means to be a constant beginner, for each moment offers a fresh opportunity; moreover a opportunity that is filled with the energy of being alive and present. My inclination to abandon one beginning in favour of a new one has emerged as a concern over writing this thesis (I might say that one of my quality criteria is to finish a piece of writing). It has also connected to other interests that brought me to the doctoral programme in the first place as we will see when we examine my first piece of doctoral writing (2001) in the next chapter when I asked myself, what do I stand for? Do I blow in the wind too much?

The suggestion I made as I wrote to inquire into my feelings of frustration over my beginning process was to try to start from where I was: to look back at what I had written and to accept what it is that I have already started to do. This is simple and, at one level, obvious. A simple re-frame is involved – I have started, so what is it that I have started to do? What is also involved is to treat my own work as not being completely apparent even to me. Taking this attitude involves taking some distance from my own writing in order to get closer. It involves a suspension of common sense: after all taking some distance from what I have spent so much time and effort producing myself may seem to be a rather odd thing to do. Yet it turns out that time and time again when I do this I discover aspects of my own work that were not apparent to me at the time I wrote the words. This experience of discovering or revealing things in my own writing corresponds to aspects of my life as a process consultant, where I have to remain open to being surprised by what interests me or what I find myself doing when working

with a client. Later in the thesis I describe situations where things like this occur. As far as writing as inquiry is concerned the question arises concerning what qualities are needed to write in an emergent way? I have already referred to aspects of patience and waiting as in the “early morning vigil” of my opening paragraph to this chapter. What other human capacities are related to writing emergently?

Having asked the question about “human capacities” I notice a slight reaction. On reflection I realise that this relates to a concern that “emergence” might be shorn of its rather mysterious quality. Might become simply a quality of myself that can be trained or developed. I can see that I might wish to explore the ways in which I have a kind of emergent process in my work or life; however, I also like the potential implications of “emergence” as being a quality of the world; not of my making at all. A social process, or as a process of nature for example – I don’t at this stage want a frame that would exclude these possibilities for inquiry. Marshall speaks about communion and agency as a “potentially complementary coping strategies for dealing with the uncertainties and anxieties of being alive.” (Marshall 2001: 434). If I introduce “emergence” within this conceptual frame then I might consider and inquire into the idea that *I have* an emergent approach towards my work (including my writing), which has arisen in response to the challenges I have faced in the work (particularly being a process consultant “lost” in large systems – see Chapter Two). Then I would be taking on emergence as an aspect of my agency, in the sense of being a part of my “independence, .... self protection, self assertion and control” (ibid: 435). However, in this thesis I also want to take the stance that “things” might *emerge to me*. From this perspective emergence carries for me “the sense of being ‘at one’ with other organisms or the context, its basis is integration, *interdependence, receptivity*.” (ibid. Emphasis added). In the context of writing emergently the concept of communion raises the prospect that my writing might be a way of “‘in-forming’ me, that is of giving shape to my way of seeing, not simply imparting information in frameworks already established.” (ibid)”. In this chapter I want to explore the possibilities for writing to be genuinely exploratory: to constitute a mode of research in its own right. Key to such a process is the attempt to write about my present, in the moment experience, as I did when I broke from writing the thesis to address directly the problem I faced with beginning. How else have I written about my in the moment experience? How does the attempt to do this reflect a style of living my life?

## 1.2 Writing where I am

In this section I expand upon the theme of writing emergently by considering the roots of my attempt to describe present experience; also considering the value of retaining in the text a trace of its origins, as part of realising writing as inquiry.

Exploring my response to being stuck in the section 1.1 above reminds me that I have taken in and made a part of my consulting style a particular way of responding to being stuck. This “way” or approach animates the questions raised in the extract I quoted at the beginning of the previous section: “What if I was to just start to write in the expectation that how I began would reveal the direction I needed to take with the thesis? If I trusted what arose and worked with it, taking it seriously as a beginning?” In one way my whole interest in emergence could be traced to a simple injunction taken in as part of my training as a process consultant: *If stuck just try to say where you are: in that way you need never be stuck*. This phrase is a kind of mantra that I carry to help me professionally, for, as an organisation consultant, I am often in strange places with unknown groups of people trying to sustain myself, and contribute to the understanding and resolution of problems I am struggling to grasp. I first learned the discipline – for that is what it has gradually become – from Sonia Nevis a Gestalt teacher who taught me much, mostly by example, but occasionally like this in the form of a simple injunction about using myself. In the immediacy of consulting it’s a hard thing to do, and often I miss the opportunity; I’m left feeling that achieving this state of presence is a little like trying to measure up to Noel Coward’s definition of wit: something you wish you had said ten minutes earlier. I mention this aspect of consulting here because it provides one reason why I should have continued to try to “say where I am” in my doctoral writing: it’s an example of my life leaking into my writing style. But that, on its own, would not be a good reason for introducing it here into my writing. What exactly does this practice add to the research process?

To respond to this question I would like to return to the way I began this chapter. I began to write this chapter with a complaint at how just starting to write failed to support me in defining an overall purpose for the thesis. I would like to return to that complaint over beginnings and take up that complaining spirit in order to make a slightly different explanation of my experience – one that looks more sympathetically on my repeated beginnings. It is true that on each of these Summer mornings, as I have come to my writing place, I have been moved differently from the day before, and that often I have been unable to pick up from the previous day’s writing. As a result I have launched off in a slightly different direction, animated by some oneiric inspiration, or by some emerging determination to get to the bottom of something that came sideways into my consciousness the day before, and lodged there, to grow overnight. The result is a succession of beginnings and a growing body of text, which needs ordering in some way. So why do I continue to write like this? What would be lost if I was to stop trying to write emergently – to say where I am?



I notice that when I start to deliberately organise the text into a whole that two particular things occur. First I start to hide the origins of the text. Not deliberately or from bad intent. I aim at more coherence and continuity – to make sense of the whole in a clearer way. As I do I notice that I start to exorcise the “false” starts and the loose ends so the whole piece is crafted into a neater more logical sequence and order. Discontinuity is smoothed over; the present gobbles up the past. Secondly, as I do this I notice that my voice tends to change. I move away from a more tentative discursive style into a crisper more clipped advocacy. Sometime this progresses into a shift from a first person style to a third person as my confidence that I have answered the question or found my feet turns into a kind of expert posture. For short hand purposes I sometimes call this voice my consultant’s voice, for a kind of succinct, clipped expertness often informs my writing for corporate clients “Can you say this in a page of bullet points?” is an archetypical request that internally guides much of my consulting writing. What is lost is the fact that usually I can only achieve anything like this form because it rests upon much personal meandering and inquiring that has gone before. Not that my corporate clients are usually very interested in this – they want the action and in this way want the future. They are not much interested in the past: reasons perhaps, but origins no; clear causes yes, but ambiguities no. I’m not citing this in order to criticise my corporate clients, but rather to emphasis this neatening up as a feature of crafting my writing. This tendency is supported by the technology I use as I write this piece: the laptop computer with its word-processing software. With this I can exorcise the past in my writing at a stroke. My small black notebook operates as more of a natural palimpsest, but anything noted there has to be transformed by this tap, tap, tapping, into the computer from where, in a particular way, being present focused can be fully realised. Something of an irony, then, that I should start by valuing a statement of present existence, and end by lamenting the loss of the past. Why should I care? Why would I want to keep the, often messy, origins in sight?

Put at its simplest I fear for what might be lost. I suspect that in the messiness and the emergence of sense lies the capacity of writing to be inquiry. That if I want to explore writing as inquiry I cannot just show the end results, but must also engage myself with the process of achieving those results. That to be true to my inquiry I cannot just talk about this process, but must find ways of showing it here on the page. If I cannot do that then how can I authentically make my claim that writing may be a form of inquiry? (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005: 974; van Manen, 1990: 31-32.) It is in this spirit of showing myself that throughout the doctoral writing I lift my head look around and describe what I see. As I look back to find these moments in my six years of doctoral production, I notice that these descriptive moments often stand out from the writing within which they appear as a kind of interruption. They frequently have little or any framing, and often little attempt is made to incorporate them into the surrounding text. In this sense these pieces have some of the character of exercises such as the finger exercises a pianist might perform, except in my case I’m not

too sure, at the time, exactly what it is I'm exercising, or for what. An aspect of the doctoral journey is the gradual uncovering of what is involved in these practices. Why do I insert these descriptive pieces into my writing?

Let us look together at an example of what I mean.

It's 6.30am on the morning of Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> June [2004]. I woke up early and then couldn't get back to sleep for worrying about this piece of writing I'm working on for my PhD. I'm actually not sure how to go on with it – I'm feeling a bit stuck. As I sit here I sense a movement in the garden to which I respond by looking up from my desk. A rather battered looking fox is loping across the lawn, no doubt heading round the side of the house into the wooded area at the back. As he moves across the lawn he intersects a pool of early morning sunlight filtering through the trees. For a moment his down at heel, moth eaten looking appearance is transformed by the dappling sunlight. His skinny body ripples in the sunlight while the browns and blacks of his coat shine out in a multitude of different shades. I sigh at the easy grace of it all, wishing there was someone else with whom to share this moment. The fox disappears around the side of the house, but my attention stays with the dimpling sunlight. I notice a shift in my inner state; a movement in my confidence; a small surge of energy. I start to write this piece, happy to start by describing this experience. (Inquiring into my use of Gestalt in Organisation Consulting, June 2004: 1.)

Later the decision had to be made about whether or not to leave this paragraph in. It sat rather strangely at the beginning of the piece of writing, which was about my Gestalt therapy background. Should I have treated it like the canes that support the young plants in my garden - removed once they had the strength of self-support? Or should it have been left in as evidence of where I had come from, and as *potentially* significant in its own right? At the time I left it in, although I did not say much about the choice to do so. I felt it would turn out to be relevant without fully understanding why. As it turned out pieces like this, which appeared to be rather extraneous at the time of writing, gained in significance as the doctoral journey progressed. As I acquired an understanding of the term "life world" from my engagement with phenomenology, I began to understand this way of writing as a way of seeing myself in situation. I came to understand that allowing my self to respond to what arose in the moment was also a way of documenting and revealing my life world. The new word coincided with an incompletely understood practice, reinforcing my understanding of both word and practice<sup>18</sup>. What had been left in took on more significance in the light of later developments in the research journey.

Writing like this is also a form of practicing attentional discipline (Marshall, 2001: 433; Torbert, 2001: 251). In the course of the doctoral journey I come to understand that expression and experience are related. Writing is a way of illuminating and bringing to attention what is experienced. In this sense

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<sup>18</sup> The capacity of language to re-frame my perspective on aspects of my situation becomes a particular aspect of my inquiry in Chapter Four of the thesis.

retaining pieces like this also shows method in practice – shows and records how I have sought to pay attention. How else have I come to support writing like this in the thesis? What practical supports have I developed?

### 1.3 Supporting emergent form

How have I supported writing emergently in the way I have sought to construct this thesis? It has been a new experience of the doctoral journey for me to write longer pieces in an inquiring way. It has been an especially challenging prospect to face writing this thesis. I have supported my writing by developing a structure of texts and also through practices of writing. The “structural” supports are not in themselves original, although their value has come to be appreciated as I have sought to manage the production of a longer piece of writing than I have ever written before. The main support is to simultaneously write five texts or bundles of texts:

- I have drafted an *Introduction*, which frames the purpose of the thesis, the area into which it seeks to contribute knowledge, my approach to action research and other important matters that are normally considered as important preparation for what follows. I see the Introduction as a text that develops in parallel with the other texts especially the one I describe next.
- I am producing text such as this, which I refer to as the *chapter text*. This will form the vast bulk of the thesis. As I write this is the main focus of attention in the writing effort and is likely to remain so for most of the period during which the thesis is being written.
- I am also writing *footnotes* as I go. I use footnotes for ongoing meta-commentary on the chapter text on points that are important, but which it doesn't make sense to include in the chapter text; this might be because to do so would disturb the flow or unbalance the attention being given to a particular point. For example I placed a comment about my relationship with my supervisor in a footnote, because it was important, but difficult to include directly into the Introduction I was writing at the time. Also I sometimes place additional reference material in a footnote, such as a quote that is interesting but only obliquely relevant to the point being considered at the time.
- I am preparing a *bibliography* as I write the thesis, and I sometimes prepare other documents to be included in the final thesis such as *Appendices* or *diagrams* and *charts* on separate sheets of paper for inclusion later. These are normally prepared in a rough draft form at the time when they occur to me, and they are perfected later. For example I have a rough draft of a personal bibliography of key material I have written during the doctoral journey; this will be tidied up into an Appendix to be attached to the main thesis.
- Finally I also have other documents that are less directly supporting the main writing effort. Included among these are copies of my original writings from my doctoral journey, and pages used to capture pieces of writing discarded from the *chapter text* (usually) as I go.

I move around between these texts as I write the thesis. For example I have experimented with taking this account of different texts out of this Chapter

and placing it in the *Introduction*, but I have returned it here because the Introduction was getting too large and cumbersome. I also return regularly to fine tune (and occasionally modify more dramatically) the part of the Introduction that states the purpose of the thesis; it has been re written several times as a result of insights that have arisen as I have written this *chapter text*. In this sense the thesis is a dynamic evolving process, the production of which involves ongoing inquiry, as I make decisions about where to locate material, and make connections between developments in one text and the other four. By working concurrently with these five categories of text I feel I am creating space in the chapter text within which to be more emergent, and do more 'showing'. This is because the other texts take some of the burden of tracking and providing continuity. Finally this structure of texts in relationship is a form of organisation that can be modified as I proceed. For example the idea of having a discard document for each chapter evolved out of a couple of frustrating moments when I discarded material only to regret the decision a week or so later. I support my ability to move from one category to the next with an extra screen plugged into my laptop, which is so co-ordinated with the laptop that I can easily move documents from one to the other.

These concurrently evolving texts provide a basic support for writing the thesis in a way that has structure but is still open to development as it is produced. I also support my writing in other ways. An important way is to keep the spirit of inquiry alive in my writing by keeping track of the *questions* that arise from the writing, and the *choices* that I make, usually in response to these questions. Most obviously this is a discipline of showing my thinking as I write; a way of leaving a trace of the development of my thought through the text. This makes the development open to the inquiry of others and also to myself at a later date. In this subsequent inquiry it is possible that other forms of question will be revealed - those that were not articulated fully or at all in the text when first written. Returning to articulate more fully the partly revealed or latent question is one of the ways in which the text may form the basis for a subsequent round of inquiry; "Why did I do that?" develops into "what was the question I was answering here?" The historian Collingwood advocated a particular way of looking at the past relevant to this point (Collingwood: 29). He spoke of history as leaving behind the visible responses to questions that have now been lost. They may have been 'lost' because they were never articulated in the first place, perhaps because at the time people did not have the sense of making a choice, because they were just doing what seemed obvious to them, or because the questions, once articulated, have been covered over by the subsequent answers. He advocated that to deepen understanding of the past it was necessary to search for the question to which the answer of historic practice was responding. Whilst I am not setting out to inquire into such distant times as Collingwood I am often looking back, seeking to make sense of something I wrote five or six years ago - or even last week. Inquiring by looking for the question unasked at the time, places more of requirement on me to position myself within *my situation at that time*. To do this respects the actuality of what was happening at that time, and also

reveals how the writing might be guided by unarticulated questions or intuitions that may be explored at a later time. How did my writing emerge *without* having a clearly articulated question *in mind*. How might writing *emerge* from a ground that is not consciously present? How may I bring what is inchoate or unconsciously steering me – what is latent or in the process of emerging – to light? Questions such as these arose early in the doctoral journey as I reflected back on my writing. Such an interest in the revelatory potential of my own past production gathered weight as the doctoral journey progressed until it coincided with a phenomenological approach that deepened my understanding of being unconsciously located in place (Chapter Four).

During the doctoral journey I have enabled myself in turning back to my own texts through a discipline of preserving the original text as it was when submitted to supervision. In this sense it becomes a document of record, as if it had been published in a journal. On some occasions I modify and re-submit my original text to the following supervision group, but in this case it is preserved as a separate document<sup>19</sup>. This enables me in looking back to my past productions as source of material for how I was documenting aspects of my life world at that time (Richardson, 2005: 965). As I explain more fully in the next Chapter these texts have also been the subject of inquiry with my supervisor and fellow students.

I also apply the discipline about subsequent editing of texts I mentioned in the pervious paragraph more tactically as I preserve aspects of a palimpsest (Richardson, 1997: 23) in my own writing by editing the pieces I write with discretion. I have already provided one example of this when I quoted the piece about looking up to describe something in my garden and then decided to retain it, and other examples will follow. These practices preserve some of the integrity of “then” and in so doing “narrativise” my own life (Richardson, 1997: 31). This practise provides an extended awareness of the past in the present; preserves the substantialness and dignity of the past, and also makes it available to help make sense of the present. As the doctoral journey brings me into contact with phenomenology I also make more effort to separate out my descriptive pieces from my explanations or theorising (van Manen, 1990: 54-55; Merleau-Ponty, 1962: vii). When I re visit my writing practices in 2006, I am struck by how they seem to foreshadow and prepare me for the turn, which my doctoral journey will later take. With hindsight I appear to quite quickly slip into a mode of documenting my life that then provides an essential ground for tracing how I belong in the world. It may also be that I knew in some way that this was the path my journey would take, even before I had consciously articulated it.

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<sup>19</sup> This discipline is not invariably followed in the first year of the doctoral journey as I was not then fully aware of it as a deliberate practice. It emerged as a more disciplined practice over 2002.

Taken as a whole these practices amount to an attitude towards my own historic production. It is an attitude of taking a distance from it; standing back and holding it as if it were in some way not my own. What does it mean to distance myself from my own production like this? To assume that there is something there to be discovered, or revealed in what I wrote all those weeks, months, years ago?

#### 1.4 On taking a distance from my own text: reading as well as writing.

Addressing the questions posed at end of Section 1.3 involves understanding myself as a reader as well as a writer. In this section I explore the correlation between reading and writing. In tracking my own questions and choices, as described in Section 1.3, I necessarily became a reader of my own production – to be a writer is to be a reader just as to ask questions is to invoke a response – to become a respondent. Movement between reading and writing may take place quickly, as when I re-read what I have just written as part of a process of staying in touch with the developing text. Other times the reading may take place a substantial time after the writing. I now have six year-old texts that were produced, and submitted to the CARPP supervisory process at the beginning of my doctoral journey in 2001. How do I now read them? My response to this question develops as the doctoral journey proceeds. It is particularly influenced by my engagement with phenomenology, which provides me with an approach, which, as I take it up, also feeds back to build my understanding of phenomenology as a practice; also to enrich my interest in the question of how I am situated in the world, and where I might find sources of energy and excitement. How do these reciprocal influences develop through the doctoral journey?

To understand how I came to answer these questions I first need to describe a problem that unfolded as a result of my decision to document my life world in ways that maintained the temporal integrity of the texts. The problem that my process of documenting my life world set up for me was one of interpretive method. On the one hand I felt under pressure to grasp what I meant when I originally wrote the piece in the situation in which it was written. This seemed to demand as *literal* a reading as possible, addressing the face value of the words as they were written then, and restricting the interpretive effort to trying to ascertain what I meant then. The same logic applied to reading any text – what did the author mean to say when she wrote those particular words? The attraction of this approach was that it accorded respect to what was written ‘then’ as in itself significant: the word acquired an importance that in some way transcended or framed current interpretation. This honoured the past as a moment in my existence. On the other hand, what was written then was being read now in this moment of my existence. From this perspective what was written then was open to my current re-constitution. Here the word from the past only had meaning in so far as it made sense to me now. I gobbled up the past and made it my present. What was attractive about this orientation was that it permitted me to invest my past production, and other people’s words, with fresh life: to make them relevant to me here and now. So how did I both respect the facticity of the written word, and bring it into my present? How did I have both respect for the original word, and bring it to life by taking it into my current existence?

I have spoken here as if reading my own past work and another’s were the same. I recognise there is a distinction between reading someone else’s



words, and reading my own. In regard to my own writing I will have access to more of the internal process that motivated the writing, because the words have merged originally from my own life world. But, as the doctoral journey unfolds through an engagement with phenomenology from July 2003 onwards, so I understand more fully how my life world is in a constant state of development, and is not, in any event, perfectly transparent to me. This creates a potential gap in my comprehension even in respect of my own work, and my own life. It is this gap that opens up an avenue into inquiry through my own past work. To exploit this gap requires *deliberately taking of a stance of curiosity or wonder towards my own work*. This is tantamount to holding back on my tendency to assume knowledge and to slow down my interpretive process. In phenomenological terms this would be a form of bracketing (Hammond, Howarth and Keat, 1991: 25-26; Sokolowski, 2000: 49-50; Ladkin, 2005: 119.). In 2003 I encountered a particular refinement of this principle, which caught my attention and shaped the development of my methodology.

The passage that caught my imagination was one in which Merleau-Ponty<sup>20</sup> was describing an approach to take towards any phenomenon that appears to us; he was seeking to describe how to hold the ‘thing’ in our perception, whether it was a person, object, or concept.

Things [will] through their perspectives, offer themselves ... only to some one who wishes not to have them but to see them, not to hold them as with forceps, or to immobilize them as under the objective of a microscope, but to let them be and to witness their continued being - to someone who therefore limits himself to giving them the hollow, the free space they ask for in return, the resonance they require.” (VI 101)

I asked myself how could my own writing be this kind of “free space”? I imagined holding a thought or idea, or something I had said in the past lightly, as if it was a small animal with its own life. Would this be a way of refining the description of what I was doing, as I sought to read and write in a way that was open and encouraged emergence? I was struck by the idea of a “hollow” as a way of speaking about a writing space – how could I create

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<sup>20</sup>As I forewarned in the Introduction sustaining the metaphor of journey poses problems when it comes to the introduction of Merleau-Ponty. My encounter with him is a moment in the unfolding journey and I want to honour that by positioning his full introduction into the thesis properly. However I cannot write as if I was completely untouched by the journey I want to honour. In some sense there is no beginning or end; there is just the way the past and the future come into this present now. However to recognise and cope with the problems of my chosen form does not necessarily mean abandoning the choice – just finding a way to manage the dilemma. In this case I’m using one of my ‘textual structures’ – this footnote – to acknowledge the problem and to indicate that I shall strive to say enough to sustain understanding now whilst promising a fuller explication of how I come to be adopting these particular views of this particular thinker until later in the thesis. I will use footnotes as a tool for helping to sustain this balance between the needs of my chosen method and the necessity of present understanding.

my text as such a space, so that what is in the text would reveal itself? Putting things in this way, suggested a de centring of myself, and, as a result, slightly shifting the basis of the choice that I was presenting to myself to either be as literal as possible, or accept the other's (including my own past self) production as an object for my own projection. The centrality of myself in choosing whether to hold myself back, or put myself in, that is suggested by the framing of that choice now started to look and feel different: now there was a third term in the form of the phenomenon itself with which I am in a potentially more subtle relationship. This way of thinking about how to read texts, and also how to conceive of the kind of writing space I was creating, particularly appealed to me, because of the turn that my doctoral journey was taking during 2003. As I describe in Chapter Three I was at this time particularly open to ideas that involved a change of attitude towards my own self, and enabled me to distance myself from my own self-absorption. In this way my own experience was shaping and also being shaped by the intellectual content of the journey as it related to reading and writing.

My process of writing as inquiry continued to feed back into my intellectual inquiries on the journey especially as they reflected on my thinking about myself and other people. As I continued to conceive of my writing as a hollow, or bowl, within which things might emerge, and show themselves I explored what it meant for ideas, concepts etc to have hidden or unexplored sides. This was another way in which the problems and issues produced by my writing choices reciprocated into my theoretical understandings, and helped to accelerate my energy for both writing and intellectual inquiry. I asked myself how my writing could be a "hollow" in which ideas or concepts might emerge? How could I conceptualise taking a distance from my own production as I re-read my own work? As I responded to questions such as these (from 2004 onwards) I discovered that, according to Merleau-Ponty, the visible thought was surrounded by a kind of penumbra of other "articulations" existing as "fields of possible variation" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 160). These "articulations" existed as "reflections, shadows, levels and horizons between things", and as such "do not exist as objects of thought" (ibid). What I took from this was that any text, *including a text from my own past*, had its own substantial presence, but was also only "half open before us" (ibid). It was simultaneously "unveiled and hidden" (ibid). In these circumstances the latent meaning – that inchoate sense of the otherness of the text – was to be preserved, and to invoke from us an inquiring style that would have qualities of "complying with" or "letting be" (ibid), provoking the question, what *emerges* for me as I read?

In this section I have reflected on how in the doctoral journey I sought to take a certain posture towards reading my own text. This posture towards reading correlated to a way of thinking about my writing as opening a certain kind of "hollow". The essential features of my approach towards reading and writing were a) to construe my own writing as 'other', and b) to treat what I (and others) had written as indeterminate – as possessing latent content. These methodological moves provide a counterpoint to the

development of substantive themes regarding my relationship to others, and to myself, which I develop in this thesis. In this way the methodological development of the research reciprocates with the development of the content of the research. I suggested in my opening paragraphs to this Chapter, that writing may be a “vigil”; a waiting for something to come, or a looking back to see what needs to be encouraged forth. I have gone on to suggest that I might write as if I was preparing a hollow in which things might emerge to show themselves. How in practice might I write to achieve this? What kind of process might I use to bring forth the hidden content in my own writing? In the next section I describe a way in which I used an examination of my own historic production to develop quality criteria from my own writing as I looked back on it from the first half of 2006.

### **1.5 Developing quality criteria for my writing at the EGOS conference.**

Having introduced the connection between reading and writing in Section 1.4, in this section I illustrate this connection further with an example from my own inquiry practice: a paper presented to an international conference. In this paper I developed three provisional quality criteria that I claimed were implicit in my practice of doctoral writing. In this section I adopt these criteria for the thesis, although I do so with a reservation. My reservation concerns the necessarily provisional nature of these quality criteria in the face of the way that quality emerges as a feature of the evolving nature of the thesis. I discuss the evolving nature of quality in this section.

At the end of 2005 I was presented with an opportunity to explore questions such as these when I was invited to submit a paper to an international conference: the 22<sup>nd</sup> EGOS Colloquium (European Group for Organisational Studies.), which was due to meet in Bergen, Norway between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> July 2006. The invitation, which came through my association with CARPP, was to prepare a paper for the Standing Working Group on “Validity and Epistemology in Action Research”. As I reflected on how to approach my paper for this conference I conceived of a plan to develop a paper for the conference that would encourage me to continue my preparations for writing this thesis: I decided to read through all the papers that had been submitted to CARPP supervision to identify the emergent quality criteria. Here is how I described this in the paper I produced.

What quality criteria do I use and where do such criteria come from? At this stage in drawing my PhD work together I have been re-reading and cataloguing all the writing I have submitted to supervision. The supervision process is that these pieces are circulated for discussion in a meeting with my supervisor and a small number of fellow students. I record [on audio tape] the discussion that goes on about my piece, and my supervisor then returns the copy with hand written comments inscribed against the text. Often I will receive written comments from other students in the group as well. As I have read through my work and read/listened to the commentary I have aimed to notice how the work develops under the processes of dialogue and feedback. From this inquiry I have made notes about the quality principles that appear to me to be guiding this development: those which can be interpreted from the commentary and the way my writing and consulting responds. (EGOS Conference paper: 2)

This idea did not just pop into my head. I already had in mind that my research process consisted of recording, documenting my life world; also I had in mind that I would return to this documentation as a source of material for my thesis. This predisposition was then reinforced as I thought about what I would like to show the conference. At the time (early 2006) I was putting the finishing touches to a paper for a Gestalt Journal (Farrands, 2007). In this paper I had re-visited the fundamental idea of a gestalt as a figure appearing against a ground. As I reflected on my invitation to the EGOS conference, the coincidence between receiving the invitation, and my double preoccupation with finishing the Gestalt paper, and starting to write

the thesis seemed propitious. I decided that I would try to combine these preoccupations for the EGOS conference. I conceived of myself as revisiting *the ground of my doctoral life* by re-reading all my historic material. I thought that the figure was the double moment of the beginning of the thesis and the end of the Gestalt Review paper. I asked myself how do I re-visit the ground?

I decided that if I was to respect the work's status as background then I would have to eschew a frontal approach – that after all would make the material figural. How could I approach more obliquely? I decided to read the material in a particular way. To open myself to what came sideways as I read: to the intuitions and feelings that the reading gave rise to and to try and capture these. At the time I was also reading Donald Schon's book *The Reflective Practitioner* in preparation for some work I had been asked to do with an architecture practice in Philadelphia. I was intrigued by the way Schon wrote of "designing as a conversation with the materials of a situation" (Schon, 1978: 78). How could the materials of my situation speak back to me as in a conversation? This seemed like a proper respectful attitude with which to approach the mysterious presence of the ground. There was another, slightly embarrassing factor as well. Although I never met Donald Schon I imagined a gentle reflective man, and I felt drawn to his style: could I do this piece of work in a way that might honour him a little? Could I have a conversation with the materials of this situation? I picked up some of Schon's language again when I offered in the paper further explanation of my research process. I positioned my inquiry through reading my own work as being based on believing that I could, "draw provisional conclusions about [quality] principles as they are applied in practice, (rather than those that are espoused)", and I offered these comments on the process I had followed:

This retrospective gaze provided by my re-reading and re-listening reveals more than was apparent to me at the time [when I first wrote the papers]. I have not always *deliberately* sought to apply these principles, but I believe I can see in my PhD writing that implicitly, (and sometimes explicitly), this is what I am leaning into practicing. What I am aspiring towards. The practice is clumsily and incompletely practiced particularly, as the article will show, when I am acting and writing outside of the academy. .... How am I practicing what I profess to be aspiring towards? (EGOS paper: 5)

When my supervisor returned her copy of my EGOS paper she had underlined the phrases marked above which seemed to me to especially emphasise "leaning into" and "aspiring". The highlighting strengthened my interest in what is emergent, latent, in the act of becoming. This solidified my interest in the theme of emergence. I think it also set in train something else that crept along the bottom of my consciousness as a kind of background feeling to my time at the EGOS conference. I felt seen by my supervisor through the way she picked up these particular phrases. I fancied that if I had emphasised parts of this extract it would have been these parts. This encouraged me to think that I was indeed ready to start writing my

thesis; that in some way being at the conference as a representative of CARPP denoted that readiness.

The paper that I prepared and presented was based on this mix of reading my own work in the receptive way I have described above. I read and catalogued all my CARPP production (the catalogue is at Appendix A), writing in my notebook as I went, the evocations and feelings that were aroused. The paper I produced was in three parts. In the first part I hypothesised three provisional quality criteria for my work drawn from my reading and “conversing” with the material. In part two I applied these criteria to an extract from my most recent piece of writing (the piece for the Gestalt Journal which I have already mentioned) to gauge their usefulness and test their validity. In part three I drew some conclusions. I presented this paper to the sub group. I also gave a copy to my supervisor who was attending the same sub group meeting. She returned her copy to me annotated. As the paper captures important aspects of my thinking about quality in action research at just the moment when I am about to start writing the thesis I intend refer to them here, and to ask how are these quality criteria for this thesis?

The three provisional criteria that emerged from my reading were: 1) rich evocative describing, 2) openness to possibility, and 3) voicing and situating questions. This is what I offered to the EGOS conference about the first quality aspect.

*Rich/evocative describing.*

Where I speak from my heart with a story, metaphor, or choice of words that touches my reader then I receive positive affirmation [from my supervision group]. Where I rush along with careless choices of phrase, or lose myself in abstract language then I receive a corrective. It seems to me that my writing is being assessed in terms of its ability to be evocative, to connect through an alignment of internal will or feeling (Cunliffe: 2001). There is a patient tolerance even with my stumbling attempts at poetry. There is no rigid drawing of lines such as “this is not social science: it’s (attempted) literature”. All the time I am being encouraged to write fully about the situations in which I find myself, and to find good ways of using the language so as to connect with the reader internally through feeling and evocation, and not just externally through facts. Poetic as well as rational modes of communication are in play. Poetic evocation as well as crisp literalness (*Judi: so taking own choices in attending.*)<sup>21</sup>: both these modes are being encouraged but I notice myself honouring the former more as a line of development (*Judi: mmm?*).

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<sup>21</sup> I take these comments on my text by my supervisor and (in other extracts) by fellow students as being like conversational moments; they punctuate and emphasise aspects of my own text acting as a provocation to further reflection. In the quoted piece I refer to receiving a “corrective” through comments such as this, but on reflection I think that is too strong a way to word what is going on for me: I don’t feel corrected – more like provoked to think.

As a balance to this I notice that I am also criticised for showing self indulgence where I fixate on my own experience or seem to lose a sense of wider purpose: “what is this for?” This is often connected to comments about framing or sustaining the narrative flow: “not sure where you are taking me now, Rob” (EGOS paper: 3).

I take two aspects of this extract as being especially relevant to the writing of the thesis<sup>22</sup>. First I feel encouraged to take the telling seriously. To describe ‘where I am’ (ref my earlier sections of this Chapter), and to respect description as an important moment that is separate from analysis (van Manen, 1991: 31). As the writing of the thesis continues over the ten months following the EGOS conference I deepen my understanding of the significance placed by phenomenology on description, and so my attachment to this aspect of quality in my work is reinforced. Trying to describe where I am takes on even more significance as the thesis progresses, and I seek to open to more of my situation with others in the world. This focus on description is counter-pointed for me in this piece by the reference I make to “self-indulgence” and loss of purpose. These become fundamental themes explored as I write the thesis. I take them on as methodological questions about my purpose and self-centeredness; also they resonate into the substantial themes concerning energy and excitement, especially as I seek some kind of synthesis for the thesis in Chapter Five, and as, how do I block my energy?

The second quality criteria I identified from my reflection on my work concerned remaining *open to possibility*. Reading the piece again in April 2007 I think it could just as honestly have been headed “Openness to Other”. The question of bringing other voices sufficiently into play is arguably the main topic in the extract that follows. This is very relevant to this thesis. During my writing of the thesis I discover that the first person inquiry process does tend to circle me back towards myself in what can become a centripetal spin. Introspection becomes a focus of the thesis in Chapter Three as it picks up on events from 2002 and deepens my understanding of this time; also, in the Chapters that follow, I search for a more energetic and healthy way to bring my own subjectivity into play. Here is what I offered to the EGOS conference

#### **Openness to Possibility.**

A more or less constant refrain from the commentaries is a reminder that my voice or my perspective is not the only one available: “You are sounding too dogmatic here”; “This could be interpreted differently”. Comments such as these encourage me to think of alternate or missing voices or viewpoints, including for example those of other stakeholders;

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<sup>22</sup> I experience an incipient confusion over tense as I comment on these quality criteria. I first introduced them into the thesis in July 2006, but I am now re-visiting this part of the first Chapter ten months later in April 2007. I find myself unsure about whether to write in the first person present or past tense. I think I will select first person past tense as it seems more honest recognising that I am now modifying this section with the benefit of hindsight, and acknowledging that I have chosen not to leave the original as it emerged.

also others whose voice is excluded or simply not thought about, such as the dead men and their families in the story I am going to relate. I develop an interest in what is not chosen, ..... This returns me to the conversational present and with the in the moment decisions about paths not taken; in particular how habit and sedimented experience unknowingly (?) guide these processes of “choice” (*Supervisor: a journey of exploring*). This leads to an enjoyable engagement with Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of the body and to a re-invigorated contact with my Gestalt inheritance. This then alerts me to trying to find a writing style that can craft a description of the multi-stranded nature of the unfolding situation. (*Supervisor: yoga is tacit but unspoken as another ground of your being/inquiring here.*)

The injunction to consider other voices also includes those of other authors, and theoreticians. Here the encouragement I take is to see theory as providing guidance in how to act: “Can we see you doing this?” “How was this useful?” Looking back I can see other authors tending to be assessed for their practical worth.... a little like elders providing direction (Shotter: 2005)(*Supervisor: oh, not only - but also?*)

When I inserted this extract in July 2006 I followed it with two other quotations, which I held throughout the thesis writing as kind of beacons or buoys in a channel. The first one from van Manen I took as like a warning of a wreck just beneath the surface. The second from Richardson I took to be more like the marker buoy denoting the entrance to the channel into harbour from the open sea. How might I avoid one and realise the other? From the perspective of April 2007 these authors seem to provide me with an example of what I meant when I wrote of authors as providing direction (I take my supervisor’s comments as meaning that this direction should be engaged with critically and not just blindly followed.) van Manen puts the wreck warning in a particularly direct and challenging way.

When scholars such as Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, Levinas, or Derrida employ seemingly evasive or even poetic writing styles and ways of saying things that seem elusive, it may be that such styles and means of expression are the concomitants of a more richly embodied notion of human rationality. On the downside, however, there is a danger as well: the danger that an individual of insufficient talent and inadequate scholarly experience may try to hide his or her lack of insight behind an obfuscating, flowery, or self-indulgent discourse. (van Manen: 17)

I recognise this as a risk of my style. That by making the choice to write in an emergent and occasionally poetic way I run the risk of falling into obfuscation and flowery, and self-indulgent discourse. I think I do struggle with this risk. Where I do I try to address it directly seeking to explain what is happening and how it relates to the larger themes for the thesis. To balance the picture by adding aspiration to warning let me quote Laurel Richardson and then carry both her and Manen in my heart as I go on.

Experimenting with textual form I wrote sociology as drama, responsive readings, narrative poetry, pagan ritual, lyrical poetry, prose poems and autobiography. Experimenting with voice, I co-authored with a fiction



writer, played second theorist to a junior scholar, turned colleagues' words into dramas .... Troubled by doing research on other, I wrote about my own life. (Richardson: 3)

Over the course of the thesis my first person narrative breaks up into poetry on two occasions; unable to contain my feeling within the chosen form the prose breaks out into stuttering attempts at poetry. The first is when I am overwhelmed with loneliness and frustration at my own insularity; this occurs in 2002 and in Chapter Three of the thesis. The second occasion is at the end of Chapter Five when my prose voice seems too cautious and reserved to express the wisps of excitement that I feel. Of the two the first is the vaguer and less coherent because the disturbance that invokes the poem is too dark for me to grasp entirely. On the second occasion I leap at the arising feeling more energetically and hopefully and the result, I think, is a clearer 'account'.

The last quality theme to emerge from my reading concerns

#### **Voicing and Situating Questions**

This reveals itself in many comments, which seem designed to provoke my curiosity, and to the voicing of this curiosity: "In what way is this an inquiry?". Questions are to be crafted is the encouragement I take. In particular questions are to be crafted to the situation and to possible answers so think carefully about how to position the question in this situation.

Didactic statements or too much apparent certainty are carefully challenged as something to be inquired into and perhaps held a little more lightly. I am also encouraged to articulate the question; to see it on the page; to distinguish it from the answers. I begin to write about the answers "lying about" and start to wonder about the questions to which they are the answer (Collinwood: 1938).

The questions I am being asked to address are also about me. How am I seeing myself in this situation? There is a phenomenological flavour to the return to my experience and to the implications of this for my self-conception. I begin to think of questions as bi-directional: what do I see and how does that move (shift change re-create) me? (*Supervisor: & to your deepening multi stranded knowing*) Then to see the reciprocity in this: what do I see? How am I moved? What then do I see? This causes me to find a looser way of holding the notion of my self-identity: to see it more provisionally, in relationship to my situation. (*Supervisor: ah yes*)

*Supervisor: My reading here of these peer/tutor comments is that they are a rounding out of what you are already doing too, not usually meant as 'corrective'...interesting to explore specifics e.g. "hold more lightly" may be generally a bit corrective too vs "how is this inquiry?" its [already inquiry] and wants you to articulate.*

This statement summarises a number of quality aspects already alluded to in this Chapter, viz:

- That inquiry is a skill that has design aspects. What is the right weight and shape of question for this situation? What is the question to which what we see is an answer? This leads me to express my questions as part of my process of writing as inquiry;
- Answers are to be held lightly. I conceive of the idea of my writing as a hollow in which answers (among other things) might be held “lightly” rather than gripped tightly. This is part of my way of trying to think of taking a distance from things – including myself.
- Which resonates into the claim that over the course of the thesis I come to see myself more “provisionally, in relationship to my situation” - I will have to show the evidence for this in the rest of the thesis.

Judi refers here to my previous mention of “corrective”. With hindsight I agree with her comments, although I did not always see it exactly in these terms as will be revealed in Chapter Three. The fine-grained attitude towards the structure of the question, which she demonstrates in her comment, is an illustration of the application of the specific quality criteria referred to in the extract. A question for the thesis is how do I realise the specific, detailed attention to questions that my supervisor demonstrates here?

In part two of the EGOS paper I then turn these criteria onto my own work, try to apply them and notice what arises as I do. Generally speaking I find myself being confirmed in the criteria – sufficiently for me to want to introduce them as criteria for this thesis. As a summary I propose four generic quality questions.

- How have I described what I have found with richness and evocation?
- How have I opened to the possibility of the world?
- How have I voiced and situated questions?
- How have I folded these questions back into a fresh description?

You may remember that in the EGOS paper I added a qualitative feel to these questions by asking, “how am I leaning into practicing” these qualities, and, “how am I practicing and practising) what I profess to be aspiring towards?

Although I am proposing to adopt these quality criteria I have to report on something that happened in the second part of the paper that reinforces the tentative, or provisional character of the four criteria suggested by the questions I posed in the previous paragraph. In the detailed application to my piece of Gestalt Journal writing, something interesting occurs that sends me back to reflect on the figure/ground theme that guided my method for deriving the criteria in the first place. As I sought to apply the criteria to my piece of writing I noticed that all sorts of other criteria started to intrude. As I reflected on this I came to understand what was happening in terms of the original figure/ground metaphor. According to this way of seeing things the three criteria, which had been derived from an emergent process of

listening, and being receptive, to what emerged from the ground, had become figural as I grasped them more tightly through seeking to apply them. As, according to gestalt theory every figure appears against a ground<sup>23</sup> this configuration had led to the formation of a fresh background, which was influencing the situation of deriving quality criteria. In the EGOS paper I described the process like this.

As I sought to comment on the writing on safety [in part two of the paper] I found that simply applying the criteria [developed in part one] would not do at all. Other parts of my life experience kept intruding to disturb the neatness of the process. I discover that for example I am carrying, unnoticed until I start to write, an untested belief that a Gestalt audience will not want too many questions in the writing, or I find that my writing starts to be unwittingly influenced by consideration of how my father might respond to the writing, or by the belief that richness in writing relates in particular to self disclosure. Self administered injunctions not to pose too many overt questions or to make the writing understandable for my father form quality criteria for the writing that emerge in the moment of writing, to possibly be uncovered later. They operate normatively appearing as inclinations, feelings or tendencies in the practice of writing (or of consulting for that matter). They are embodied arising from the rich sedimented ground of my life. These features can be brought to attention, or made figural, such as when I specifically notice my attitude towards a Gestalt audience: this figure is in turn accompanied by a rich ground that I could make some attempt to explore. By this process of regression I could implicate more and more of my life in this particular piece of research. What approach can we take towards a ground that is receding into indeterminacy? What can we do with an elusive reason? (EGOS paper: 14)

According to this then quality is a part of the inquiry process rather than a fixed set of criteria. Quality too partakes of emergent process. As Lather says "Validity is a 'limit question' of research, one that repeatedly resurfaces, one that can neither be avoided or resolved, a fertile obsession given its intractability" (Lather, 1993: 674). At the time of the conference my response is to assimilate quality into the general nature of an inquiry process: "Give voice to the deliberate, and, where possible, habitual choices, and ride on from there" (EGOS paper, 15). On this basis my quality criteria are also to be held lightly as guides or directions rather than as strict "criteria". I imagine a sailor's chart with a few shoals and an occasional piece of land portrayed on large acres of space that represent the sea. I imagine this rather than a map of distinct roads and pathways. This associates quality for me with direction and vigilance. How do I approach this? What should I be wary of? At the end of the thesis I take this double-edged aspect of direction and risk, and use it to think about my own relationship to my situation in the world. It is another example of how thoughts about method and process interleave with the substantive questions for the thesis. How do I keep quality alive as an always, already existing

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<sup>23</sup> I explain my understanding of Gestalt figure/ground later in the thesis. Here I just want to provide enough detail to make explicable the point about quality criteria I make in the next extract.

aspect of my inquiry? How do the substantive themes and the quality themes wrap themselves around each other?

## ***CHAPTER TWO: Writing and my life***

### **Introduction**

This chapter contributes to the thesis by showing, and describing, the way in which writing has been assimilated into my life. The chapter provides evidence of writing as a new expressive medium thoroughly grounded in my life; also of the way in which taking up writing has changed my life – sometimes disrupting well established habits within our family. As such the chapter contributes methodologically by showing me using writing as inquiry; also it contributes to the themes concerning energy and excitement, by showing how they connect to the quality of my life – to my fundamental humanity as I ask, how can I enrich the quality of my humanity?

The chapter also provides evidence for the way that the doctoral themes have become fleshed out in the course of the research journey – for the reciprocation between method and substantial theme. As I have engaged more fully with writing so I have begun to realise more fully what is at stake on the journey. The chapter illustrates how writing contributes to growing my understanding of the part the doctoral journey can play in the whole of my life, and not just in a part, such as my consulting life. The subject matter also enables me to introduce other aspects of my life such as my yoga practice. The chapter is divided into five sections.

Section One, *Writing is central to my life in CARPP*, shows how writing has become the most significant expressive medium within my experiences of doctoral supervision in CARPP.

Section Two, *Writing and my consulting life*, uses my description of a consulting case to illustrate dialogue with my supervisor and fellow students around my writing and also illustrates an early preoccupation with the emotional consequences of my way of working.

Section Three, *Writing changes and disrupts my private life*, illustrates the way in which I have taken up rituals of writing within my life and the way these have sometimes disrupted established ways of living within my family. The section also enables me to demonstrate writing as an attentional discipline.

Section Four, *Writing, feeling... and yoga*, also enables me to explore writing as paying attention to the detail of experience. The section also enables me to explain the relevance of my yoga practice to the thesis.

Section Five, *Experiential knowing*, supports a discussion of experience as way of knowing (Reason and Bradbury, 2001: 9) drawing on the interweaving of writing and experience from the previous four sections..

## 2.1. Writing is central to my life in CARPP

In this section I show in detail how I have created writing as a fundamental discipline for the way I have experienced the process of doctoral supervision. This fleshes out the description of writing practices in Chapter One adding more detail of the rituals, practices and experiences around writing as an important part of my research journey.

I started this doctoral journey as a part time student in March 2001, and I am now seeking to bring it to the closure of a final written document five years later. Throughout this time there has been a persistent pattern of meetings with my Supervisor, and the small group of fellow students (between six and three for most of the period), who constitute the supervisory group of CARPP 6. I have travelled from my home in Oxford to the University in Bath (or alternate locations agreed with the supervision group) for meetings of this Supervision Group six times a year, spread more or less evenly throughout the academic year. These meetings have become the most obvious way in which I have participated in the University as a student

Within this pattern of meeting my writing has emerged for me as a particularly significant point of contact with my Supervisor, fellow students, and, indeed, with myself in my role as an Action Research student. This has arisen out of how I have taken up and developed the opportunity provided by the supervisory process. Usually, in advance of each supervision session, I have prepared, and sent out a hard copy of a piece of writing about some aspect of my inquiring self such as an account of a consulting assignment or some other aspect of my life. This has often been a new piece prepared for the session, but sometimes it has been a re drafted piece modified from an earlier session – perhaps in the light of feedback at the previous meeting. Submitting writing with such regularity became a distinguishing characteristic of my studentship, although this only became apparent gradually as our individual practices emerged, and I saw that others were not submitting writing with such frequency/regularity. My chosen practice promoted the written presentation of myself and my work to a position of particular significance within the doctoral supervisory process: I would usually go to supervision prepared to present myself as the writer of a particular piece, written especially for the session, whilst the other members of the Supervisory Group would attend prepared to respond to me in the light of my writing.

I cannot claim now that this was a particularly thought through strategy on my part. We were all being encouraged to write of course, but creating a rhythm of written production around the supervisory process was not, as far as I remember, specifically addressed in our sessions together, and was certainly not expressed as a requirement of the process. In part the practice developed fortuitously, although it doubtless then became reinforced by mutual expectations and by the way it became for me such an important part of my research process. I want to introduce some examples of how a written dialogue developed around this particular text to illustrate how I quickly fell

into writing as a kind of conversation with my supervisor/supervisory group, and how this contributed to a richly textured ground for this thesis. The extracts show me drawing together my written piece and the written comments into a kind of conversational narrative. Using the terms introduced in the last chapter my writing shows some sign of becoming a bowl or hollow within which ideas and themes emerge into visible presence. In principle, within the supervisory process being offered by CARPP, the text of my written pieces together with written comments from fellow students and supervisor would support a discussion in a subsequent meeting. Often this fruitful co-ordination did not happen exactly as planned, either because I did not circulate the material (my writing, and the comments I received from others) sufficiently far in advance, or because other members of the group simply had not the time or interest to read the material. As a result there was only rarely a discussion based on all the written material, (The discussions I did have in the group were recorded (barring accidents) on a tape or mini-disc, which I took from the supervision session along with annotated copies of my original piece). In retrospect I believe that early exchanges such as the one I will quote from in Section 2 of this chapter helped me to the view that my relationship with the doctorate, and the associated processes would orient around what I produced by way of writing. This is what developed over the five years.

The emphasis on writing has been emphasised because I have not opened up other channels of contact, at least not ones that I have taken up very fully. I think, in comparison, of a fellow student who is in a close relationship with a post-doctoral graduate of the CARPP school, and who also teaches on an MSc programme with our shared supervisor. Her life feels to me to have a more multi-channelled contact with the doctoral process than mine does. My studentship feels more focused just into the writing. This focus has been further emphasised by the way I have deliberately taken up and reinforced the significance of the written word in the doctoral journey through having my writing published. I have regrets about this, and when I do begin to open more fully to belonging to CARPP, towards the end of the research journey I experience this as a source of happiness (I described some of this in relation to the EGOS conference at the close of the previous Chapter).

In the next section I will illustrate the relation between my writing and supervision by producing extracts from the first piece of writing I submitted to the supervisory process – an account of a consulting case. This piece of was submitted to three consecutive supervision meetings in the Spring of 2001 acquiring a rich surrounding of comment and further thinking that is still able to animate my thinking six years later in the spring of 2007. I experienced this process of conversing around my own written production as exciting partly because of its double edged nature: on the one hand I received feedback about the quality of my writing to support my exploration of this ‘new’ medium while on the other I also received feedback on the content of my consulting. It was a start that reinforced my enthusiasm for writing as a vital part of my doctoral journey, and as central to my

supervisory support. Let us now look together at the specific example of writing with in the supervisory process.



## 2.2 Writing and my consulting life

This section shows me accessing a dialogue that occurred in my supervision group around a piece of my written work I produced for the group in March 2001. The conversation recorded in a written exchange back in 2001 provides fresh stimulation when it is re-read in 2006. In addition to showing the practical use being made of writing on the doctoral journey this section also illustrates the origins, albeit in an inchoate form, of substantive issues for the thesis, relating to the way I might be blocking energy and human engagement. The paper quoted below describes how as a consultant I seek to make use of “bewilderment” in the face of a large system with its technically complex issues; also how I use my “stranger-ness” as a form of naiveté, which acts as a “cloak, enabling me to foray across the boundary into their world”. This illustrates an early orientation to what is not explicit and might emerge from the process of engagement with the client, and also reveals an ambiguous attitude towards belonging to the client system and towards my own presence in the client system (how visible should I be?). How has my skilfulness as a process consultant shut me off from sources of life energy?

The first extract is from the abstract of the paper, which helps to ground the paper for the reader. There then follows a written exchange with my supervisor that was originally inscribed in handwriting against her copy of my article. I subsequently typed these comments into a copy of the article and re-circulated it with my response. The article is the first piece of writing produced for supervision and the commentaries (including my responses) were added for supervision sessions in March and April 2001.

**Abstract:** The purpose of this article is to provide an account of the work of an organisation consultant from a Gestalt perspective. The first part describes a particular assignment with a strategy team working on behalf of a multinational oil company in an intense examination of technical and strategic scenarios for the first half of this century. This includes an account of how the consultant struggled to make use of his own bewilderment, and sought to sustain “stranger-ness” in his relationship with the client system..... (Farrands, 2001: 4)

*Supervisor:* An assumed goal or explored as potentially generative or degenerative - and what would make it either?

*Me:* I didn't start with the intention of being bewildered or of using my "strangeness" specifically. BUT on reflection I do carry a value about occupying a boundary position with the client system. I have a sense that this comes from two places. One is an intellectual construct about the nature of being a consultant: a *slightly alienated figure who in part is generating alienation* from the existing habits as a way of shifting awareness (similar to Mangham: 97). I also have a sense that this intellectual stance is supporting something deeper in myself, which may account in part for why I consult at all, and why I do it in a particular way. This is very much ongoing but I have a hypothesis that I have a *relational style that is simultaneously drawn towards contact with others and also*

*fearful of it.* I want and I resist. How shall I continue to explore this aspect of my self- particularly in the consulting settings in which I deliberately contact strangers? I assume largely without question that "strangeness" is generative - interesting? (Emphasis added.)

*Supervisor:* OK....and in the sense of a conscious feature (previously chosen, not discovered only in this engagement) working from strangeness seems to be a deliberate, choice of style. And I was checking if this is inquired into ....as history in any encounter.

The exchange highlights two aspects that bear particularly on how the research will subsequently develop. The first is the reference to "alienating" as a quality of myself and also a quality I am seeking to bring to the system ("generating alienation"). In my response to my supervisor I suggest that alienation may be a route to awareness. Retrieving the reference to Mangham, on which I was relying, enables this to be clarified. Mangham was working with the idea of life as a performance in which people adopt roles. He speaks of taking a "metatheatrical perspective" in order to get closer to the phenomenon being experienced – a paradoxical notion of moving away in order to get closer.

Taking a metatheatrical perspective is an act of alienation, a large scale effort at role distance. Alienation, in the way that I am using the term, is the art of *making the familiar strange* by stepping outside it. It is the process of disrupting the taken for grantedness of every day life. As Brecht (1940) puts it: 'We make something natural incomprehensible in a certain way, but only in order to make it more comprehensible afterwards. In order for something known to become perceived it must cease to be ordinary; one must *break with the habitual notion* that the thing in question requires no elucidation. (Mangham, 1978 : 97. Emphasis added.)'<sup>24</sup>

My reference to this part of Mangham illustrates how I was interested at the beginning of the doctorate with the idea of being able to see what is closest to hand by stepping away from it. This idea takes on more substance as I

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<sup>24</sup> Mangham's description of social being as a performance highlights a dramaturgical perspective on social life, which, in the words of Michael Billig, "is poorly equipped to deal with the argumentative aspects of social life, principally because of its emphasis upon social regularities and the coordination of scripted performances." (Billig: 14). The dynamic nature of social life means that the settled aspects of existing as a social being will need to be held together with those aspects that are about displacement and struggle. In this regard Billig does not claim that the metaphor of a theatrical performance is unhelpful, but that it is incomplete. The staged performance is only part of the picture he asserts, and takes place against a background that reveals conflict and argumentation:

"If all the world is a stage then what goes on backstage is being excluded. Thus a complete sub world, that of the theatre is not being considered as the model for social life, but only one element of that sub world: the public performance." (Billig: 15)

Billig proceeds by opening up the figural metaphor to its ground in the disputes and arguments that have been necessary to present the smooth performance.

engage with phenomenology later in the doctoral journey. It also relates to a second point I would like to make based on this article, which points towards an underlying concern about the cost to myself of my approach to process consulting. What is this cost and how does it tie in with the overall journey?

To help me respond to the question with which I finished the previous paragraph I would like to show a further extract to illustrate how I was using a number of images to try to express relational aspects of consulting. With hindsight I think I can detect emotional roots to this imagery- its these 'roots' that I'm in search of here. In this piece we see 'strangerness' being given a further twist of meaning through the idea of naiveté, and the metaphor of cloaking<sup>25</sup>.

My notebook reveals that as I reflected upon the two initial meetings with the project leaders I found myself thinking of my role as being like that of a curious stranger travelling among a strange tribe – engaged with the client system but definitely not a part of it. ....On this occasion, it felt as if my main gift as the stranger was my naiveté, rather than any particular answers to the emerging dilemmas. The naiveté was also my cloak, enabling me to foray across the boundary into their world to capture what I needed to feed my own reflective space. This empowering stranger-ness was also something to be kept in balance: a tension or dialectic between in and out. To lose the strangeness too quickly disenfranchises the naiveté however to become too remote or to stay remote for too long also loses the right to inquire in this way. The dialectic of stranger-ness / increasing familiarity needs to be managed in such a way as to sustain the energy at the boundary between the client system and myself, because it is here that we will expect to see the emergence of a clear shared idea of the work which needs to be done. (Farrands, 2001: 5-6)

The cloak in this piece is obviously a magic cloak of invisibility; it enables me to hide myself. As the cloak is constructed out of a kind of naïve wonder it presents an interesting conjunction between seeing things freshly with a strangers eye and *moving in and out of visibility*. (I'm reminded of a time when my children were little and they would put their hands over their eyes in order to hide from me). The most direct reference for the cloak of invisibility is with spying, with its connotation of seeing what one is not supposed to see. Less obviously, and more positively, the cloaking metaphor suggests that others may need to be given space in which to show themselves, and that this might be provided by how I orient myself towards them. In this sense I take the metaphor of the cloak as having a generative connotation. As also symbolic of a general approach towards others – of being prepared to give them room.

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<sup>25</sup> The compression of metaphors in the piece that follows seems to contribute energy. "Cloak", "tribe" and "curious stranger" arise together with my adoption of the theatrical metaphor of Mangham. These metaphors are opening a particular sense and feeling, which is what I now go on and explore.

Yet I also understand my interest with this and the other metaphors used in the piece as being about the potential personal cost that might be associated with “hiding”. In my response to my supervisor’s comments back in 2001 I noted a style of contact with others whereby I was both drawn towards contact with others, and also “fearful” of it. How am I a process consultant because it suits my emotional style? How has taking on the “cloaking” process described above effected my ability to really open to, and commit myself to others? Not long before I became a consultant I spent three years trying to manage a highly aggressive industrial relations situation in a large car plant: I was successful partly because of my ability to deflect violent emotion so I could stay calm in the middle of the storm. I can see something of that quality here in this case. Over the course of the doctoral programme I began to evaluate that life position. I wondered if my feeling antenna have become a little blunted through a constantly used deflective style. When I do encounter Merleau-Ponty he encourages me to see my simultaneous attraction and fear of contact as an embodied, generalised state that I have adopted as a kind of comfortable home for myself. According to this hypothesis this kind of ambiguous approach towards contact is a kind of recognised ‘abode’ for myself: a home I habitually seek, without thinking, whenever I’m drawn to either close contact or complete exclusion. As I think this through I wonder at the deeper emotional roots of my research interests. Do I want more excitement? Have I drifted into blandness?

This piece also shows something about me that becomes a resource for me on the doctoral journey. This is my willingness to stand in my bewilderment. This comes up again in the following Chapter of the thesis and then again in 2006 when I am reading a book by the phenomenologist and philosopher Jan Patočka. He makes a connection to bewilderment, which excites and opens something out for me. I feel as though at the end of the journey I’m returning to revalue something present in this early moment. The connection Patočka makes to bewilderment, is explained like this by Petr Lom in his introduction to Patočka’s book *Plato and Europe*:

[As Patočka reminds] us of Plato and Aristotle’s remarks that philosophy is borne from wonder that we are able to ask questions about existence, Patočka emphasises that this wonder is also bewilderment. For the discovery of questioning, seeking the truth is also accompanied by the discovery that the world reveals itself in an equivocal or two-sided way: it always oscillates between the comprehensible and the incomprehensible, identity and difference, truth and error, good and evil. Yet such equivocality or problematcity is a testament to human freedom: because of it, both philosophy and independence of action are possible at all.” (Patočka: xvi)

To read a phenomenologist associate wonder and bewilderment like this reminds me of how Merleau-Ponty quotes Eugene Fink, Husserl’s assistant, when he describes a phenomenological stance as “‘wonder’ in the face of the world.” (1962: xiii). A few lines further down Merleau-Ponty writes that this wonder is the source of a kind of radical reflection that “alone is consciousness of the world, because it reveals that world as strange and paradoxical” (ibid). This reminds me directly of the way Mangham spoke of

being incomprehensible in order to be more comprehensible in the quotation I give above. As I reflect it seems to me that these thinkers are all pushing in the same direction; towards a process of stepping back in order to get closer. Is there a way in which I can honour, and possibly transform my own movement towards and away from contact?

These reflections, on the presence of aspects of my doctoral themes from the beginning of my journey, came to me as I re-read my own writing, and the responses it had evoked within the CARPP supervisory process. In my re-reading in the summer of July 2006 I was able to see my bewilderment more clearly as a potential resource for myself, because of the engagement with ideas around phenomenology in the intervening period. Looking back helps me to think again as I write the thesis. Also as I remind myself of my initial concerns I gain a helpful sense of continuity. This resource from the past is made available to me by the way in which I have taken up writing as an important aspect of my doctoral research and fattened out the writing in conversation within my supervisory group.

### 2.3. Writing changes and disrupts my private life

My doctoral writing is not constrained to my life as a doctoral student or an organisational consultant. I rapidly extend the reach of my descriptive effort on the programme to include my personal life. This section illustrates me doing this. The section also provides a closely observed description of how writing was intruding into my life. I have retained the close detail of this to provide an example of using writing as a practice ground for practicing attentional discipline, and, in so doing, for bringing experience to memorable life.

On a prominent shelf in my study sit twenty handwritten notebooks of various sizes and shapes. I have taken handwritten notes throughout my time studying; although the degree of care and deliberateness about this increased significantly in October 2004 when I started to keep a series of 'Moleskine' notebooks (currently – august 2006 - I am on volume 12 of these) which I carefully indexed as I went along. These notebooks include a wide variety of material all recorded chronologically; preparation for and accounts of consulting assignments are juxtaposed with notes from books or articles, together with reflections on the PhD and even the occasional shopping list. On the whole the writing in these Moleskines is very different from that in the notebooks that preceded them. The most obvious difference is that I am writing at greater length on each event that merits (in my eyes at least) a mention, and that there are more of these eventful occasions: it is now unusual for a day to pass without some writing in the notebook. The writing also has more of a continuing presence. I pick up one of the older notebooks and have difficulty in understanding what the writing means or when/why it was written, whereas in the later books much more attention is paid to indexing, and to writing more distinctly and coherently – as if the presence of a reader is more in mind at the time of writing.

As I flick through one of these later notebooks now I notice that, unlike its predecessors, it has the feel of being a part of a larger whole; a single body of writing contained within the twelve volumes. If I randomly pick up volume three (4<sup>th</sup> May 2005 to 1<sup>st</sup> June 2005), open it, and lay it alongside a later volume I notice distinct similarities and some differences. Both have indexes although in the later volume the index has progressed from the back to the front, providing a reminder to me of the way in which the index has moved from being an afterthought to being a much more integral part of the process of producing the writing. Both indexes reveal the same mixture of different aspects of my life, particularly my consulting and my doctoral life: this can be illustrated by reproducing the first four items for each volumes index:

#### Vol Three

1 – 13. Joanna Macy at Hawkwood.

14 – 27. MP [Merleau-Ponty], Barbaras, R. "A Phenomenology of Life"

28 – 31. Reflections [on the doctorate]

32 – 59. GISC [Gestalt International Study Centre] Leadership: 2.3

Vol Twelve

1 – 2 Exotopy

4 – 29 EGOS Conference. Bergen.

29 – 31 Shell. XYZ [I'm protecting confidentiality here], preparation.

32 – 41 Reflections on PhD shape/purpose.

A more extended comparison reveals another qualitative difference in respect of the doctoral content. In the earlier volume there is much more note taking from books I have read. Quite large chunks are sometimes transcribed without a lot of additional commentary from myself. I take this as a struggle to understand without a lot of integration into the specificity of a particular thesis. This contrasts with the later volume where much more of the space is taken up with planning this writing of the thesis. Each morning there is the assemblage of a plan at varying levels of detail. Every now and then an attempt to sketch out the whole and on other days just a few notes about what I will write about that morning. These notes often arise from an oneiric state; maybe a specific dream, but more likely that half awake time, cuddled next to Bridget in our bed, as my body comes back into consciousness to re engage with this task. The handwriting in this notebook has become incorporated into the ritual of writing the thesis. "Ritual"? Why do I choose ritual"? How has the writing become a ritual?

*Rituals of writing*

I would like to address the question posed at the end of the previous paragraph by describing in some detail how I have shaped my life around processes of writing. I do this for two reasons. a) I want to consolidate the significance of writing in this doctoral journey by providing a detailed description of the practice of writing. The quality of the description seeks to be evidence of a claim that writing has been significant for me on the journey. The evidential value of this description depends in part on whether I am able to evoke something of the feeling of, "Yes, I see what he means!" Laurel Richardson tells us in "Fields of Play" (1997), and also in the article she co-authored with Elizabeth Adams St Pierre in the Handbook of Qualitative Research of how she had "yawned her way through" (2005: 959) many exemplary qualitative studies. She tells of how she set out to see if it was possible to "create texts that were vital and made a difference" (ibid: 960), and to explore the idea that "*texts validate themselves*" (ibid. Emphasis added). Does what follows have this quality of self-validation? b) I first wrote this detailed description as a form of exploration for myself. If I sought to document what was happening to my life as a consequence of writing more often in greater depth would that help me to understand better the role that written expression was playing? Richardson and St Pierre claim that they have found "*writing as a method of inquiry* to be a viable way in which to learn about themselves and their research topic." (ibid: 959). From this perspective I'm trying to write in a way that illuminates what I'm writing about (i.e. the writing process), and also the 'me' that is doing the writing. This double illumination is what I later come to mean by writing about a life world – myself in my situation.

On most evenings during which I have been writing this thesis I have done whatever I needed to do to prevent interruption the following morning<sup>26</sup>. For example if I'm worried about responding to an e mail or paying a bill then I will do that in the evening so I prepare myself to be able to focus on the thesis; ensuring that the space and time will be available for me. When I awake and get out of bed at about 5.30 a.m., I follow quite a disciplined routine. I put on my smelly yoga clothes and pad downstairs into the kitchen. Our dog, Feste, will be sleeping under the kitchen table and will snuffle a greeting, shaking himself into wakefulness as I move to the counter to fill the kettle. While the kettle is boiling I slide open the glass door onto the rear deck of the house and step out to feel the early morning air. Then I return inside, take out my small blue teapot and my "special" cup with an aubergine painted on its side, and place them on the counter. I sometimes play a game in which I have to find, and clean if necessary, teapot, and cup (and get out the tea) before the water in the kettle has boiled, telling myself that I will not have good day unless I do so!

Once the kettle is boiled I put tea and water into the teapot, and move through into my study, usually followed by Feste, still sniffing and grunting himself awake. At my desk in the study I survey the garden and (hopefully) the arriving sunlight, open the notebook and begin to scratch out my preparatory notes. I reinforce the sense of ritual in the process by invariably using the same "special" pen: a "uni-ball micro Deluxe waterproof" (sic) pen produced by Mitsubishi Pencil Co. Ltd. (I have four boxes of these pens in my desk drawer...one blue box, one red and two black). At this time I am often still with arising from my bed<sup>27</sup>, and on these occasions I think of corralling the thoughts from my waking body much as a shepherd might corral his sheep together each morning, counting them as they emerge from the night. But as I express this metaphor I notice that it's not entirely satisfactory to me. I remember times when the thoughts are not properly

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<sup>26</sup> The tense structure of this and other writing in this thesis reveals a problem of temporal structure, which is quite revealing of writing an account and trying to be open to continuing inquiry as I do so. When I'm clearly in reporting mode then I tend to use what I understand to be the present perfect continuous tense such as this first sentence. It distances me slightly from the action by presenting this action in a slightly more passive way as something that is ongoing. When I'm inquiring from the text then I use the simple present tense, which moves me closer to the action. This is the tense structure I gravitate to quickly in this paragraph. I'm trying to describe something as if I was doing it now. Through the tense form I'm trying to draw you in: let's take a tour around my practice, which will simultaneously be something of a tour around me! You'll notice that I sometimes struggle with sustaining "tense" continuity. Often this is because I get a bit confused about whether I'm telling a story (present perfect continuous) or inquiring now (simple present).

<sup>27</sup> Here's a tense shift from simple present to present perfect continuous: am I describing or commenting – I'm a bit confused and it shows as a hiccup in the flow of the text. This confusion goes on for the next few sentences.



formed, but seem to exist like a gentle haunting of my waking body, tempting me to try to coach them into visible form, by coming to this special place and writing in my notebook. This noting acts as a prelude for turning towards my laptop, opening this file of writing, and beginning again to tap, tap away, transforming what has been written into existence in my notebooks into this form here; a “transformation” that has several distinct qualities.

As I type on the word processor my writing undergoes a transformation from a handwritten form that shows its origins through the amendments and changes to the text, into a form that tends to hide its origins. This distinction serves to differentiate the two forms of doctoral writing; also to link them in the sense that the handwritten notes provide a source of content, and form (the plan of what I will write is a shape as well as a content) that is then expanded upon in the typed text. In this sense there is a cycling motion between handwritten notes and the word-processed content. The handwritten notes feel more intimately mine; my the body feels more intimately related to the text because of the skill involved in moving my hand across the page. There is the residue of a kind of analogical sense in this form – I underline things, write more clearly and boldly for emphasis, scratch incoherently when I am feeling incoherent, strike through, or leave trailing into nothing the unsatisfactory or irrelevant. In contrast the tapping of the keys always discloses the same form of letter and word, no matter how angrily, or lovingly the keyboard is struck, or caressed. Attention to the unity and to the differences in my writing form brings me back to considering the way this whole process of production is also unified by its common space and the “ritualisation” of this space. The evocation of ritual has connected my text to a deliberately created context; also it has generated for me a feeling for the physical dimensions of the writing process – the space, the scratching and the tapping. It also reminds me through pattern and repetition of the practice qualities of being a craftsman. In addition there is also the feel of something mysterious happening; I think of an ancient, calling down the gods of writing! This activity does not take place within an empty space – it is introduced into an existing life space: with what effect?

#### *Disrupting established rituals*

I want to respond to the question at the end of the last paragraph by describing how writing has disrupted my life. I do this to illustrate that writing itself is a life practice - something that has inserted itself into my life. Writing has become important to me.

I have set out the space within which writing will take place. I have organised the books and papers of my doctoral journey into a position of prominence within my study, clearing out a special bookcase for articles and books relevant to my studies. I have also created a separate writing area in another room, so that I might continue undisturbed when Bridget, or our shared assistant Kate, occupy our study. Into this time and place I have then developed a practice of writing, which, although varied by the contingencies

of life, has persisted sufficiently to become a routine for me and also for others. The social life of the office and the family home have been reshaped slightly by my commitment to this discipline. For example Bridget tries to leave me alone in our shared office until Kate arrives at about quarter past nine, and Kate is becoming adept at guarding me from being disturbed by clients and also at sensing when I should be disturbed. My children and a wider circle of friends have also come to organise their contact with me around this rhythm. In ways such as these, organising the context facilitates the writing to set in train further processes of organising space and time, which involves other participants in my life. This has changed our life together.

Such change has not been an entirely smooth process. One of the ways in which writing has appeared as a disciplined practice is as a disruption to well established patterns. Here the slightly unbending connotation of that word “discipline” seems to me to be appropriate. For example, getting up so early means that I am tired by the early evening, and usually ready to go to bed shortly after nine in the evening. In the history of our married life this is early, and Bridget will only rarely be ready to come with me. When she does come to bed at ten or eleven I am usually asleep, so she sneaks into our bed without the chance to read for a while before going to sleep, which would be her normal habit. Disrupting well established shared habits of how we go to bed is not inconsequential in a marriage. We lose an opportunity for contact as we potter around the bedroom together, chatting about the day that has gone, and perhaps peering into the next day together; also opportunities for sexual contact are reduced by moving out of synch our nocturnal habits. Writing is a personal process, but this personal aspect resonates into my relationship with others and into the institutional framework of my life. The influence flows back the other way: my writing is sustained and supported by the second and third person changes, which are initiated by my taking up of writing as a discipline. I could imagine for example that Bridget’s attitude towards the disruptive element in my writing process could be less accepting and encouraging; this would directly impinge on my ability to discipline myself.

According to the account provided above the introduction of writing into my life is a significant intervention. The process of writing (regardless of what I am writing about) has operated as *dissonance* or a force for *de-centring well-established habits*. Writing de centres me in my life world. It provokes an inquiry by changing my relationship to taken for granted aspects of my existence. This stresses the significance of my chosen method. Writing has become a way of life; the process of thinking and experiencing and researching that writing facilitates has become a part of the way I am. This in itself is new and, potentially exciting. How will I build on this potential?

## 2.4 Writing, feeling...and yoga

In this section I describe how writing about my life and bringing writing so thoroughly into my life involved me in the relationship between *felt experience* and writing. My life is lived in a felt way, and from early in the doctoral journey I engaged with the task of trying to write authentically about feeling and sensuality. As the journey progressed I began to appreciate that writing might also illuminate feeling by accentuating it, making it more memorable, and also by aiding in the process of sense making. Writing provided a kind of bridge between thinking and feeling.

The year 2006, when I started to write the thesis, was an emotionally turbulent time. In this section I begin by saying something about that in order to position some of the emotional background to writing the thesis. I then provide an example of how my daily practice of yoga was opening me to the feeling-full flow of my existence. This provokes questions about the relationship between thinking, feeling and writing that I take into the next section.

### *Writing authentically about feeling*

My interest in feeling has been provoked during the last part of the doctoral journey by the discovery in November 2005 that my daughter Alice had a particularly rare form of cancer dispersed into several sites in her body. This led to intense chemotherapy, and to the whole family adjusting to find ways to best support her. For me this has been a complex experience that I would not wish to simplify by claiming to fully understand what has been happening for me or for others. One consequence has been that I have found myself weeping more – often unexpectedly. I seem to have been opened up to bouts of feeling that surge in to take me over. The immediate reasons for the welling up of tears, and the collapse of my bodily composure, often seem mysterious until I think on them later. That is why I use the passive voice of “been opened up to” rather than “I have opened to”. From the relatively narrow (in the circumstances) perspective of my doctoral studies my experience of Alice’s illness has accelerated my interest in the *emergence of feeling*, and the way in which it relates to writing.

As my experience of feeling has been that it has often caught me by surprise or kind of dispossessed me, I have also become even more interested in processes of tracking what arises for me, as I turn back to interrogate my experience. Where did that come from? In doing this I have been able to draw on resources laid down earlier in the doctoral journey. These have been partly intellectual resources as I will explain further on in this section, but they have also been resources of practice. The practice I would like to describe here is that of a daily yoga practice, and its relationship to the tracking of feeling as it arises for me in my body. The body is the site of feeling and I have found a physical practice has helped illuminate the origins and the course of feeling as it arises and becomes transformed into ideas and thoughts. Originally I had thought to use an example that referred directly to Alice, but on reflection it is too personal an example for what

will become a public document. Instead I will refer to an example that occurs in the same time frame, and which illustrates the fruit-full connections being enabled by the yoga practice as it takes place on most days of my life.

I practice yoga in the morning. If I have got up from bed early to write I will usually take a break at about nine. I move into the garden, take out my yoga mat, and work through a set routine that has been part of my existence now since I learned it in the early 90s. Weather permitting the yoga mat goes down in the same place each day that I am at home writing. This place is a small stone patio in a corner of the garden shaded by trees and bushes. From here my body moves through its habituated routine, as I pay a kind of homage to my breathing, which, in turn, brings me to noticing the condition of my body: I am alert to small nuances and connections. For example, if I have been out for a meal the previous evening and drunk wine then the breathing is more difficult to begin with, and my body is weaker. If I am too distracted by a problem that will not leave my mind then the practice is ragged and disrupted. Sometime the yoga can strengthen me, clear my breathing and my head; other times the practice breaks down, and I stumble to an end, or find myself sitting on my mat lost in thought. If the yoga goes well I frequently find that, as I finish, some problem comes back to conscious thought, but in a different way that will sometimes allow for a resolution or, at least, a different approach. My awareness is often heightened by the yoga, and I frequently find myself writing as a way of following up the yoga. In this way yoga frequently sets in train a process of experiencing and thinking. To illustrate how this may sometimes occur here is a description of an experience that occurred around my yoga. It illustrates the weaving together of a bodily practice with that of writing, and paying attention.

The experience I wish to re count occurred on the 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2006 which is just over three weeks after I started writing the thesis in Bergen as described in the last chapter. On this occasion I lay down my mat, and stood to face the rising sun. I lifted my arms above my head in a stretch, and threw my head back to look upwards. There, circling about 30 feet above my head was a Sparrow Hawk. She was languidly inscribing a tight but flat turn to the left, apparently orbiting around my raised hands. I was transfixed. In the early morning light she was very distinctive. As I looked closer, I could see that her apparent elegant languor was misleading. There was work going on. I could see her breast feathers being occasionally disturbed by her motion through the air. At her wing tips long feathers were separated and extended, working independently like fingers in the air to sustain bank and turn, while her tail feathers were twisting together to control yawing and pitching motions. The low sunlight heightened the rippling motion of the feathered body. It was a moving disclosure of work and elegance combined. By attending closely to the working figure I became conscious of an invisible participant in the drama being disclosed to me. The Sparrow Hawk was working with something that supported her - an invisible column of air that she worked both with and against. I had a strong feeling that the bird was

balanced in motion. I think with retrospect that it was my feeling of curious, slightly awed pleasure at seeing the bird's stability in motion that provoked what happened next.

The Sparrow Hawk flicked her feathers and sallied off behind my head. Then, as I started to move into my practice, a memory, until then forgotten, came back. First, it returned as a surge of nameless recognition; a feeling of familiar warmth and tenderness bursting out of me; a feeling that was then caught, or tamed, into thought. It was a part of a poem learned by the schoolboy me 40 years before. I remembered it haltingly, chanting out the alliterative sequence, which, after the practice, I went to check. A hundred years before I learned the verse, it had been written by the poet Gerald Manly Hopkins, who had seen a falcon on the wing, and had written a poem called *The Windhover*. I couldn't remember the poem accurately, but I could chant a few lines. The memory, and the stumbling repetition seemed to cap and complete the experience. After the practice I went to check the wording of the poem and copied it into my notebook<sup>28</sup>. I also made notes about the experience as I remembered it, and then, of course I quoted it here in this section of Chapter Two. It seemed on reflection to be an experience with epistemological implications. Something was given by the world outside of me – the bird was present as other than me. The presence of the bird to me triggered a surge of feeling that was gradually ordered, using language, which was processed first through handwriting in my notebook, and then through the laptop computer. As I moved into thinking about my experience a memory was triggered that was again announced by a surge of feeling. This resolved itself into a dim memory of long ago learned poem, which I sought to remember by chanting it out loud. How had the poem heightened the experience and made it more memorable? What role did my subsequent writing play?

It seemed hard to pull apart what was the 'raw' experience here. The process of nature seemed mixed up with the cultural one. Had the memory of the poem worked in the background to attune me to the bird? Had the natural event triggered the memory of the poem? What role did that sensual phase of naked feeling play? How has my subsequent writing shaped the experience? These thoughts occurred to me on that day in August 2006, just as I was starting to write the thesis. How has this experience, occurring as it did, when it did, shaped the way I have set out to write this thesis?

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<sup>28</sup> I caught this morning morning's minion, king –  
 dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn  
 Falcon, in his riding of the rolling level underneath him steady air,  
 and striding  
 high there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing  
 In his ecstasy! Then off, off forth on a swing,  
 as skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend:  
 the hurl and the gliding  
 Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding  
 Stirred for a bird, - the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!

*Thinking about feeling*

As I left my practice place and went to my study the yoga experience would not leave me. As I reflected on it I was drawn to remember another way in which I had encountered a connection between body, feeling and poetry on the doctoral journey. The memory led me back to the Spring of 2002 when I had been writing a piece called *Experimenting with Account*. As I brought forward this piece, and reflected on it afresh, it helped me to make sense of my experience with the Sparrow Hawk in my garden. The piece I went to find in my 2002 writing was a poem by the German poet Rilke. I had first seen this poem a year earlier on the wall of a Gestalt centre in Wellfleet Cape Cod where I had been teaching: the poem had been put on the wall by my teachers Edwin and Sonia Nevis. When I returned home I went and traced the poem and included it in my doctoral writing.

Re-engaging with the poet in the light of my yoga experience, my grief and love in respect of my daughter, and starting to write the thesis provided an influential conjunction. Beginnings may be propitious and I feel that this one was. In some sense the thesis, written over the following eight months provided a writing forum within which to think through what was happening in my garden on that August day, and the thinking that it provoked. In the Rilke extract I retrieved from my earlier writing, and quote below, the poet seems to me to write of how a poem has to *emerge from a deep ground of felt existence*. While this suggests a source for his poetry within the most personal and private place of his body this did not, and does not now, strike me as the whole picture as far as this writing is concerned. This is because Rilke also describes how this emergence is only made possible through a *fundamental participation with the world*. It strikes me as a very existential way to describe the sources of poetic inspiration. Let us read together what Rilke wrote:

One ought to wait and gather sense and sweetness a whole life long, and a long life if possible, and then, quite at the end, one might perhaps be able to write ten lines that were good. For verses are not, as people imagine simply feelings (those one has early enough), - they are experiences. For the sake of a single verse, one must see many cities, men and things, one must know the animals, one must feel how the birds fly and know the gesture with which the little flowers open in the morning. One must be able to think back to roads in unknown regions, to unexpected meetings and partings one had long seen coming ..... to days in rooms withdrawn and quiet and to mornings by the sea, to the sea itself, to seas, to nights of travel that rushed along on high and flew with all the stars - and it is not yet enough if one may think of all this. One must have memories of many nights of love, none of which was like the others, of the screams of women in labour, and of light, white, sleeping women in childbed, closing again. But one must also have been besides the dying, must have sat beside the dead in the room with the open window and the fitful noises. And still it is not yet enough to have memories. One must be able to forget them when they are many and one must have the *great patience to wait* until they come again. For it is not yet the memories themselves. *Not till they have turned to blood within us, to glance and gesture, nameless and no longer*

*to be distinguished from ourselves* – not till then can it happen that in a most rare hour the first word of a verse arises in their midst and goes forth from them. (Rilke: 26-27. Emphasis added<sup>29</sup>)

Rilke proceeds in this piece via a series of rebuttals. The “good verses” do not arise from simply feeling, nor from simply memories of everyday events, nor even from memories of deeply felt events of life and death, but they arise from the body into which these experiences have been sedimented; Rilke describes for me a process of the emergence of memory wrapped in feeling, which is based on a deep participation with existence. My experience of yoga took me back to Rilke who provoked me to ask whether I was experiencing life in the full way he described. Partly disturbed by the turbulence within my family, and provoked by the words of Rilke, I began to see the doctoral journey as an inquiry in to how to live a fully human existence. How was I fully alive to the world?

The poem also speaks to me of patience and waiting. Something comes but it cannot be forced. This resonates with another aspect of my early engagement with the ideas of others on the doctoral programme – my reading of Camus’ notebooks. He too speaks of patience, and of the way that experience may not be managed when he writes as follows in his notebook:

Vanity of the word experience. You cannot acquire experience by making experiments. You cannot create experience. You must undergo it. Patience rather than experience. We wait patiently – or, rather, we are patients. It is all practice: when we emerge from experience we are not wise but skilful. But at what? (Camus, 1963: 5.)

In this thesis I come face-to-face more than once with my own vanity. I also undergo unexpected dispossessive experience, and seek to find out *what it is that I should be skilful at*. A theme of the chapters that follows is the role that writing might play in helping me to patiently open to a fuller experience of the world<sup>30</sup>. I also come to see in the second half of 2006, following my engagement with the Sparrow Hawk, that an important aspect of my doctoral journey has been to find ways to see, and to feel afresh, how I am already in life: where are the sources of life energy – as they already exist for me?

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<sup>29</sup> The italics indicate the pieces my supervisor underlined when I produced this in a piece of my writing for supervision in March 2003.

<sup>30</sup> See also from closer to the action research tradition:

“This [attending to what emerges] does appear to be something that people can be trained to do, but there is something paradoxical about this. To try to learn it is to try to give-up trying; to concentrate on it is to concentrate on not concentrating; to grasp it is to let go. The whole trick is to suspend thinking and to stay aware of your experience in the ever flowing present” (Rowan and Reason, 2001: 122).

### *Writing to feel*

Writing has, from the beginning of the doctoral journey, figured as an important feature of my response to the question with which I concluded the previous paragraph. I realised quickly that, in addition to patience, opening and rich experience, I could prepare myself in another way. More specifically that I could refine my ability to express what I felt. I appreciated through my own early research experience (provided in more detail in chapter Three) that the ability to express might reciprocate with the ability to see and to feel. Alongside the extract from Rilke in my 2002 writing I placed another quotation – this time from a social scientist, who spoke about the importance of the ability to express when he wrote:

Even though there has been an explosion of self conscious writing about writing styles as tools of persuasion (e.g. Richardson, 1990; Van Maanen, 1988), what most have missed is the use of writing as a tool for comprehension. If people know what they think by seeing what they say, then the variety, nuance, subtlety, and precision of that saying will affect what they see, question and then pursue. Most people now writing about rhetoric in social science write with confidence, color, and nuance and seem to take for granted the fact that their linguistic competence enabled them to spot, label, and understand the issues of rhetoric in the first place.....Daft and Wiginton (1979) argued that organisation analysts were handicapped because they use low variety language to portray high variety entities. Daft (1980) followed up this argument empirically and demonstrated a growing gap between the complexity of models applied to organisations and the simplicity of the language used to discuss the models.

The counsel here is simple. Do whatever you can to increase the variety of the language with which you work. (Weick, 1995: 196)<sup>31</sup>

Weick reminds me that there is competence involved in expressing what I feel. Through expression, I locate my feeling and bring it into the world of thought, where it might be preserved in some way rather than disappearing into the next felt moment. One aspect of this competence is the breadth and depth of my skill with language<sup>32</sup>. Later when I encounter Merleau-Ponty I will discover him writing about words as if they were themselves sense organs: “an organism of words, establishing in the writer or the reader as a new sense organ, opening a new field or a new dimension to our experience.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 182). In the later chapters of this thesis I will illustrate how I take on the idea of words opening me to the world differently. What form and vocabulary do I need to hold the complexity of my research journey?

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<sup>31</sup> Weick’s logic is similar to that in Shannon’s Law, derived within the field of cybernetics, which states that a complex system needs an equally complex management system to exercise control.

<sup>32</sup> Not just language of course. There are other expressive media.



Weick, Merleau-Ponty and Rilke help me to see two separate, but related, craft elements in my inquiry: the ability to describe evocatively, and the effect that this then has on my perception of the given world. My writing evolves throughout the doctoral journey into a way of interrogating what is given: the act of writing takes me back to the experience, and in the reciprocity of seeing and writing I discover the possibility of enriching and elaborating both. This is one way in which the act of writing is in itself a form of inquiry. To adopt a musical metaphor, developing an expressive style can be seen as a form of finger exercise, but the same moves on the keyboard will also inform the sonata that follows. In the context of Rilke and Merleau-Ponty this suggests to me that, although the inquirer might not be able to plan for the emergent they can prepare themselves, and that one mode of preparation will lie in the practice of articulation through speech and writing. This adds an element of active preparation to set alongside receptivity and openness.

*The quest for authenticity in writing, expressing and feeling*

Rilke, Merleau-Ponty and (less explicitly) Weick argue for a kind of authenticity that creates the potential for writing to be expressive of a world.

“...what we say here applies only to first hand speech – that of the child uttering its first word, of the lover revealing his feelings, of the ‘first man who spoke’, or of the writer and philosopher who re awaken primordial experience anterior to all traditions.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 179)

There can be other forms of writing which are, in Rilke’s words, “false”, or in Merleau-Ponty’s, constitute “second order expression, speech about speech, which makes up the general run of empirical language.” Am I able to get in touch with my own “first hand speech”? If I am will it show me the world of my existence differently? As I engage with phenomenology from mid 2003 onwards I come to understand my situation differently, and this reinforces in me an interest in how I express myself in writing. I engage with the idea that I have access to the real, but that this real is indeterminate – “partly veiled” in Merleau-Ponty’s words, and that my responsibility is to express my perspective. This way of seeing things helps me to invest my own perception – my own truth- with more dignity, and to prepare myself to accept more responsibility. This move is one strand that moves me towards some attempt at the resolution of the questions that motivate the thesis. Can I discover energy in my truth?

My growing sense that this question about my truth is an important one for me encourages me to return to my own experiences of those moments when I am taken possession of; when the silent basis of my existence seems to surge up and demand attention. Those moments I can prepare for, but not plan. Those moments that challenge me to discover a union of thought and expression, which will adequately express what arises: to witness and honour. Merleau-Ponty speaks of reaching for something first hand – of daring to believe this is possible. Rilke speaks of expression as being the culmination of a life, as being the product of a “wait” in which “sense and

sweetness” are gathered. Camus speaks of “patience” and of the “vanity” of believing that we *have* experience. Weick speaks of the skills of expression that might adequately bring us to the world. How might I write this thesis in a way that honours these thinkers? Is it possible that how I write will be as important to my chances of illumination as what I write?

As I inquire into these possibilities during the writing of this thesis I come to understand more fully the paradoxical nature of language. On the one hand the whole fabric of language is a cultural accomplishment of which I partake – it is a way in which I am socially and historically situated. The paradox is that this fabric is an enabling one; it does not tightly constrain me to only seeing or saying what the prepared stock of meanings indicates. Luckily language is not this precise and regimented. It has ambiguities and gaps through which language opens to the world. “Expression is never absolute expression, what is expressed is never completely expressed” (Merleau-Ponty, 1974: 37). I have the opportunity to take up and use language in ways that will create something about the world that has never been seen or said in quite this way before. That is a possibility to be explored in the rest of this thesis.

## CHAPTER THREE: disconnection

### Introduction

In chapter three I document a further deepening of my inquiry into fundamental questions concerning vitality and change in my 50s, such as how can new things be brought into my life – what will it take for this to happen? I probe for the questions that have felt life energy behind them, and directly engage with what it takes to make room for the new in my life.

I explore the discordant and disruptive aspects of clearing a space in a life that is, in many ways, full of assumed competence and taken for granted truths about myself, and the world more generally. I have to face the fact that I am not so competent as I thought I was as a process consultant, and in other ways. The stability of my successful middle-aged life is disrupted, questioned, turbulated<sup>33</sup>. In the course of one piece quoted in this chapter I use the metaphor of pruning to ask, what things in my life need to be pruned back to make space for the new? This aspect has some of the feel of being stripped naked; I shiver and try to cover myself. I feel humbled.

Holding myself in inquiry during this phase of the journey is not an easy matter. I discover the discipline of *persevering* despite an inclination to turn away towards what is comfortable and known. My supervisor encourages me by telling me that she discerns some energy and strength to keep my inquiry going despite my difficulties. I have a real experience of trying to do what Torbert asks of us as inquirers (and which was so easy for me *to say*):

What does it take to wish to see and participate in every one of our moments, both the attractive and the unattractive, dispassionately, compassionately, and passionately? (Torbert, 2001: 251)

I discover that it is not so much clear answers that sustain me in the struggle to keep attending, for there are precious few of those. Inquiry, at this stage at least, is not motivated for me by results. Instead I discover that the energy to continue comes from an emerging, felt sense of being connected to the world differently, more fundamentally, than I had understood before. This connection intrudes as confusion and bewilderment; my struggle is to keep turning to the other side of bewilderment, to lift my head and wonder. As I move from feeling bewildered to wondering I discover other dynamic forces with a similar bilateral structure or form: opening/closing; offering/withdrawing; showing/hiding.

In this chapter I highlight one incident in my supervision group that was disturbing for me. This has symbolic as well as practical significance,

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<sup>33</sup> To reduce the lift of an aircraft wing the airflow may be disturbed which causes the craft to sink down. This deliberate “turbulation” may be caused by air brakes on the top of the wing or by lifting the front of the wing to the point where the airflow begins to break away thus inducing a stall. In some sense during this period I am losing the lifting confidence of my life and descending back to some more original space.

because at its heart was a decision I made to withdraw from my group to listen to them talk about me, and my work. The cleverness of the idea seems to bring down hubris. I learn painfully what it is to belong and to separate. I also have an experience which, when I have time to assimilate it, teaches me more about the potential for standing back in order to get closer. I gradually push into the inquiry about what it means to be deeply and sensually connected, *and* to seek to stand back from this connection. As I begin to understand more fully what it is to be situated I understand that standing back from the world is also standing back from myself, and I come to a deeper understanding of what Mangham spoke of as “alienation” in the previous chapter.

What I turn back to as I seek to simultaneously connect and detach with my life world are the most intimate parts of that world: my love for my wife and my situation in my body. I try to describe what it is like to be curled up with Bridget in our bed; I describe a brush with cancer in my doctor’s surgery, and an experience of a yoga session in the garden of my home. These accounts are not well integrated into the surrounding text: they appear as spasmodic bursts of intimate description. I remark again, in the course of the chapter, on how they appear to be at once highly personal and at the same time happening to someone else. Towards the end of the chapter I try to use the same descriptive method in respect of someone else. Later, when I encounter Kathleen Stewart’s work (Stewart: 2005), I fancy that I can see myself trying to stay close to the source of emergence of feeling and experience – accompanying its emergence. At the time I did not have this awareness. It looks as if in my inquiry in 2002 I was turning to foundational aspects of my life world; primordial aspects of my situatedness (this is my current self speaking – I would have just said “my life” before – I’m still trying to find the right words for a life that is in the world, and not just in me). Through expression I seem to be seeking, intuitively, to bring to life (or inquire after the life that is there) my deepest connections to my world: body, wife, children.

My primary mode of inquiry continues to be through written expression. Most of the time it *is* “through” just like I live *through* my body, reaching out a hand without noticing the hand that reaches, only what it reaches for. But there are times when I deliberately turn my attention to the form and shape of my writing. For example in my struggle to express my feelings I turn to writing a poem, which leads me to reflect on the relationship between artistic forms of writing and social science writing (Richardson & St Pierre: 2005; Stewart: 2005; Van Manen: 1990; Marshall: 2007). My personal motivation in writing as inquiry is not *clearly* revealed to me in this chapter (or anywhere else for that matter). I seem to be drawn to the mode of writing without really knowing why. I speculate on why I chose the written form in the specific instances of this chapter, but it is inconclusive and even unsatisfactory; the reasons I contrive don’t seem sufficient to honour the felt depth of the urge to write. I guess at least part of the reason is practical: I can’t draw, I can’t sing, and anyway I have chosen a developmental route that demands writing. My upbringing has *equipped* me

to do this tapping and scratching – perhaps it is no more complicated than that?

As I have explained in the Introduction, and in the preceding chapters, my method of proceeding with the thesis provides me with a store of documentation concerning my life world. I return to that store in this chapter to use it to re-create aspects of the journey, and also to inspire fresh reflection as I write the thesis. But returning is no simple matter. I find that I have forgotten vital details about the context for the writing; also that sometimes I find familiar feelings and thought in the words, but that sometimes there are new things to be discovered. I struggle with, what actually happened in my group meeting? I wonder at things I didn't remark upon at the time, but I'm also capable of being inspired again by my old texts: how I love my wife's body – that mysterious, warm, enraptured space we can create as we nestle into each other; it returns to me as I read my old words. To return is to *re-discover*. It does indeed feel like Eliot claimed: "to arrive where we started/ and to know the place for the first time." (Eliot: 222). Which is to say that this period was not all pain and disturbance. I cemented friendships in this period, I touched the joy in my life as well as the trouble, and I began to feel an animation to return more fundamentally to the joys, and challenges of my first engagement with Gestalt – but that is to start to describe the next step. I must not jump ahead, for the journey is important in this thesis, and predominantly it is a journey scratched and tapped out in text.

These then are the things that may be discovered here in this chapter. But there is something else arising in me now as I revisit this introduction on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2007. Some desire to try to wrap the whole in words. To bring together in some way the parts described above. What did this time in the doctoral journey feel like as a whole? Recently I was revisiting Antoine de Saint-Exupery's short book "Wind, Sand and Stars" trawling for memory. I had first read the book when I was seventeen and wanted to fly like my father. I came across this description of a journey. Guillaumet has crashed in the middle of winter when trying to fly his mail plane through the Andes from Chile to Argentina. He is given up for dead but eventually walks out to safety. Saint-Exupery encloses the following in speech marks<sup>34</sup> as though it was an account taken down directly. This extract does not say everything about the period 2002/3 as far as I am concerned, but it does capture an important part of it – especially the feeling that I was journeying back to something more fundamental and, in the course of the journey, that I was somehow being simultaneously stripped and prepared.

'I could tell from the signs that the end was coming. For instance, I had no choice but to stop every two hours or so, to cut my boots open a little more, to rub snow on my swelling feet, or just to rest my beating heart. But in the final days my memory was going. Each time I moved on a long way

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<sup>34</sup> Although, he does so rather erratically. It's not clear towards the end of this extract whether Guillaumet is quoting someone in his account, and Guillaumet's voice seems to merge with that of Saint-Exupery.

before it dawned on me: after every stop I had forgotten something. The first time it was a glove, and that was serious in that temperature! I had put it down in front of me, and set off without picking it up. The next time it was my watch. Then my knife. Then my compass. With every stop I was becoming more destitute. 'What saves a man is to take a step. And another step. It's the same first step repeated...' (Saint-Exupery: 27)

It strikes me as male imagery: the journey of hardship and loneliness. As I say above this would be only part of my own story – maybe, in the end, it is not the main part. Having said that, now in 2007, I am energised by the heroic aspects of Guillaumet's account. It lends an aspect of compassion and understanding to my reading of the events of the period covered by this chapter, and helps me to read again what happened. I feel my heart stir, and I know that some part of my energy to keep writing, even when I'm in a turmoil, lies in here – where I stand up and face what comes. Push my chest out and ball my fists like my father taught me to do all those years ago.

In this chapter I refer to the work of Merleau-Ponty even though I do not discover his writing until several months after the events related here in this chapter. This clearly presents an issue of continuity in so far as the thesis seeks to describe a journey. I repeat here what I have said earlier that this thesis seeks to be a continuing inquiry as well as a description of a journey, and Merleau-Ponty is brought forward in service of this ongoing inquiry. My engagement with his ideas, and with those of phenomenology more generally, have changed me and I cannot completely return to my previous state. What I can add is that the stimulation of the events described here provides some of the energetic interest in myself in the world that, in the summer of 2003, finds a resonance in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the embodied subject. This conjunction provides part of the story line for the chapter that will follow this one.

This Chapter is divided into four sections:

- Section One, *An event in my supervision group*, describes the consequences of an experiment with form that I conduct in my supervision group in March 2002. This description is supported by an e-mail exchange with my supervisor that is commented upon by fellow students in the group
- Section Two, *Written contact...and detachment*, presents the way in which I respond to the feeling of crisis that results from the event in my supervision group through writing a poem that starts to examine my connectedness to life.
- Section Three, *Voyeur?* Describes how I simultaneously write more intimately and continue to detach myself, providing examples of my writing to illustrate, and reflecting on my motivation.
- Section Four, *Writing/re-approaching others*, describes experiments with writing as an attempt to contact others.

The detailed sequence of events in the period March to May 2002 is shown in Exhibit 3.1 below.

<b>Exhibit 3.1: Sequence of events: March to May 2002</b>
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<p><i>12 March 2002:</i> I publish a first draft of “Experimenting with Accounts” including the account of a consulting assignment with a woman colleague in Sweden, and personal material about myself.</p>
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<p><i>20-21 March:</i> Supervision Group meets at Bath University. During my supervision session on the <i>21<sup>st</sup> March</i> I introduce a process of sitting out and observing the group discuss my work which has unforeseen consequences.</p>
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<p><i>25<sup>th</sup> March:</i> my Supervisor writes to me in respect of my behaviour during the group meeting.</p>
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<p><i>26-27<sup>th</sup> March:</i> I write a poem about my experience, and include it in a revised version of “Experimenting with Accounts.”</p>
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<p><i>26<sup>th</sup> March</i> I respond to the mail from my supervisor.</p>
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<p><i>27<sup>th</sup> March:</i> my Supervisor responds to mail.</p>
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<p><i>1 May:</i> I re-publish a revised version of “Experimenting with Accounts” which includes the poem and the e-mail exchange. together with comments from my supervisor and fellow student K.</p>
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<p><i>14-15 May:</i> at this meeting of my supervision group I receive handwritten comments to my paper from my supervisor and fellow student C which I subsequently type into a final document to keep for my records. I quote from this consolidated document in this thesis.</p>
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### 3.1 An event in my supervision group

This section provides an account of the incident that occurred in my supervision group in March 2002 around which this chapter is based. As a result of this incident I begin to re-think my competence as a process consultant and to wonder at how I am engaging with others and life more generally.

This account is laced with the mess and threat of an interpersonal encounter, and personal embarrassment at what I did and how I handled myself. Even now four years later as I re read and edit this story I am wondering about whether to excise the whole chapter. However, it seems to have had such a significant effect on what follows (in particular my turn back to Gestalt and the discovery of phenomenology) that the thesis would be rendered much less comprehensible if I was to leave it out. There really is no alternative but to plunge ahead. Such is my embarrassment at some of the details that it would be tempting to change the story in some way; however the core of what happened is recorded in an e-mail exchange between my supervisor and myself, which acts as a record to keep me honest in this regard. Why does this incident continue to be so embarrassing?

It seems to me now to be at least in part due to the element of hubris in the whole affair. I have started my doctoral journey by producing my own published material. I call myself a process consultant, meaning by that label to pronounce my proficiency in matters of human process. There is an element of boasting involved in the process intervention that proves to be my “undoing”; it is a successful intervention with a major Corporate client that I chose to introduce here in Supervision. Finally there is a kind of brutal reversal in the fact that the experience I have which so unsettles me is one that I was submitting my clients to. It is no wonder that it is in the course of this meeting that C refers to me as the “Big I am”. Yet this “cringe element” to the affair is not the whole story. My clients did not have the same experience with this process that I did on this occasion, and that in part is due to the skilful way in which I supported them and facilitated the process. By inadvertently suspending any facilitation or support I came to see (eventually) some of the contribution I make to my clients experience. The incident also leaves me feeling, for perhaps the only time, inadequately supported by my supervision group. I don’t say this out of blame, for the way in which I rapidly rolled out my experiment with no preparation or warning must have caught them by surprise; also because (and this becomes one of the significant points) the effect on me is apparently out of all proportion to what actually happens. What is released in me by the incident has as much to do with my own history and life themes as it has to do with the shape or design of the process, and my own confident entry into the experiment gave my group no inkling of this at all. Nevertheless, the event does lead me into thinking of the *situational differences* between this use of the process and the one with my corporate client, and this also proves to be a line of inquiry for the doctoral journey as a whole. So what happened?



This story begins on the 20/21 March 2002 when I conducted an experiment with the form of my session in the Supervision meeting we had scheduled for two days at the University. I had prepared a piece of writing, and sent it in advance to group members as well as my Supervisor. This piece included an account of a consulting assignment in Sweden with a woman colleague, and the first draft of some personal writing about myself in my domestic setting<sup>35</sup>. At the meeting I announced that I would like to set the meeting up in a particular way that was borrowed from a process I had been using with client managers in a large Corporation. I had (first moment of “cringing” coming up!) christened this “gossiping”, and the way I had worked it was as follows. With a manager who I knew well I had conducted a 360 degree process by having him witness a facilitated conversation about himself. He had invited his boss, two colleagues, and three members of his team to a meeting that would be “in support of M’s development”. I had then explained that my plan was to have a conversation with them about M that I would facilitate, and that he would witness by sitting separately, listening and (if he wished) taking notes. There was clearly some nervousness about this but this seemed to be calmed in conversation when I explained how I was going to facilitate<sup>36</sup> and that no one would be required to say anything they did not feel comfortable in expressing. M would then have the opportunity to tell us what he had heard and to ask any questions. The person who would decide what use to make of the information revealed in the conversation was M. In practice this worked remarkably well. I found that I only needed to ask a few questions to start and then keep the conversation on track. I started with a question that elicited positives about M that enabled the visitors to apparently overcome any initial feelings of discomfort. At least I deduced this from the way they seemed to rapidly pick up what was required; as far as I could see they were modulating honesty with respect. M reported the whole experience being very useful and revealing on several counts that we subsequently discussed in a series of coaching meetings. M and I had also discussed another agenda for using this process. It was a culture of engineers and, although 360 processes were well established, they were paper based and ponderous: this lighter touch seemed to us to be making a contribution to opening the system up to more organic feedback processes. We had reckoned that any loss caused by the correspondents playing to the gallery of the boss, or M, was likely to be

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<sup>35</sup> Somewhat confusingly I retained the same title for the writing I was producing before and after the meeting of the 20/21 March: “Experimenting with Accounts.”. after the meeting this writing is developed by adding in the poem I write shortly afterwards and also the e mail exchange together with the associated commentary from myself and also from my supervisor and fellow students.

<sup>36</sup> I kept it very simple building the discussion around three questions: what do you find most useful about M’s leadership? What seems to you to be underdeveloped or not present sufficiently in his leadership? If you could have one thing different what would it be? The conversation lasted about 40 minutes after which we heard from M about his conclusions. There was then a brief discussion about the process itself – about 20 minutes.

outweighed by the social value in getting 360 processes on the map in this relatively quick and direct form. The positive response from M (he still talks about it as a direct and memorable experience) encouraged me to count it as a success<sup>37</sup>.

So that was the consulting experience in outline. I introduced it into supervision because I had noticed that it was difficult to really get discussion going around my written work and I thought that this would help. I was thinking that my presence as author might be constricting the conversation in some way and was interested in seeing if the group would have a different experience if I extracted myself. I sat apart from the group and asked them to have a discussion about my work. In the event not everyone had read the work I had produced and this encouraged the discussion to be as much about myself as the writing. I believe the subject matter of my writing also encouraged this. I had written about a piece of work I was doing in Sweden with another consultant. I had spoken about my feelings for her and the group were obviously interested.

The effect of sitting witnessing this conversation caught me completely off guard. I found that not being able to join in as they discussed me (particularly as I had given permission to enter personal territory through what I had written) sent me further into myself so that I felt completely dislocated and objectified. Looking back I can see some situational features, which helped to achieve this effect. I did not prepare my supervisor, or any one in the group for that matter, with what I intended. I did not think through the personal implications of not having a prepared facilitator, or of suddenly springing this on the group: with hindsight remarkably care-less. As I think about it now I think the reason for such carelessness was that I was trying to impress the group. I thought this was an original idea and I wanted to show it off. Also I remember wanting to encourage us to experiment with the form of our supervision and I thought that this would encourage such experimentation. It seems obvious now that I should have been more careful about assuming such a purpose and using such a process – at least to have been more explicit about what I was doing.

As I see it now I approached the session casually in almost arrogant disregard of the sensitivity and potentiality of the very changes to human process that I professed to be so skilfully aware of. I can best summarise the

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<sup>37</sup> I can trace some of my thinking behind the design of this process back to the doctoral programme. I had felt myself encouraged on the programme to find ways to situate clients more within their social contexts. For example a fellow student C had suggested that I read David Campbell's book on "The Socially Constructed Organisation", and this had helped prompt me into thinking of practical ways of introducing social constructionist ideas into my consulting. This particular intervention was also socially constructed in the sense that the idea came originally out of a conversation with my partner Bridget as we reflected on the bureaucratic paper based 360 systems being set up in some of our major clients. Bridget and I continue to use variations on the process described above.

effect on me with an extract from the e-mail exchange that I will examine in more detail in a moment:

....the triggered emotional reaction to what was happening was of a terrible loneliness and sense of rejection based on being judged and found wanting. In this state what would have been quite small things, such as people not reading the paper, became magnified into further anomie: it comes to me as a desolation / isolation that is difficult to describe. A sort of arid desert. (Experimenting with Accounts, 2002: 1)

As the email exchange reveals the consequences of this “experiment” continued to reverberate through out the session. I did not “say how it was” for me. I pulled back from contact, and started to unintentionally disrupt the proceedings of the group with childishly needy behaviour that was indirectly calling out for some kind of support. In retrospect it seems that the harder I tried to be included the more I compounded my negative contribution to the group with egotistical, self-referential behaviour. This was not a therapy group. The main purpose of the CARPP supervisory group was to support a doctoral journey. As a consequence, the immediate cause of my distress was not addressed, and within the scope of the doctorate, this proved to have beneficial effects as the energy released from the exchange was funnelled into the formulation of inquiries that reached beyond my own personal issues or problems into considering my situation, and the situated nature of my experience. This at least is how I come to see it now, but it was not my experience at the time as the e-mail exchange shows.

#### *An Exchange of e-mail*

I will set out the e-mail exchange in full including the comments that are subsequently added by my supervisor and fellow students. I have italicised the comments made by others on the mails in order to make a clearer distinction between these comments and the original words of the mail.

In the first mail my Supervisor initiates contact, offering a mix of what she saw, what concerned her, together with an invitation for contact. She approached her student (me) in the second person, as a member of the learning group offering feedback; also in the third person as a Supervisor within an institutional framework. From my perspective this wove together a second and third person presentation: she appeared to me as Judi and Supervisor, leaving me with decisions about how to orient myself and to respond.

Judi is writing to me on the evening of Monday 25<sup>th</sup> March 2002 three days after my session at the supervision meeting on the 21<sup>st</sup> March 2002. A month after this exchange, on the 20<sup>th</sup> April I prepared another piece of writing, which included this exchange of mail, and sent it to my supervision group. I received an almost immediate response from fellow student K who had typed her comments into her copy and returned it to me. I then took this modified copy made some further changes and sent it to my group on the 1<sup>st</sup> May 2002. As a result I received a further layer of commentary from Judi

and from fellow student C. I have reproduced the email exchange here together with the comments on the exchange added by my supervisor and fellow students as this was subsequently revealed to my supervision group<sup>38</sup>. This is what Judi wrote:

Dear Rob

I wanted to email after my reflections as I drove home after CARPP last Thursday.

I want to say this clearly, but keep it 'light' (as in not a fixed interpretation) and open..... please help me in this as you listen. By the end of the two days, I was picking up impressions of possible dynamics which I wanted to reflect back to you in a questioning way.

I felt that you had been offering bits of information about yourself, or ideas which had been sparked for you (there was quite a self-oriented tone in my impression of what you were doing), but often doing this as the time for that 'slot' was finishing or had finished.

This made me conflicted about responding. I could not do so, because that would have pressured the time boundaries still further. But not doing so felt like rebuffing sought connection of some kind (and after Thurs am group exercise, *[This refers directly to my experiment]* seemed that it might feed an impression that you had that people were not interested in you, might even seem rejecting. Whereas I felt a bit 'set up' by your timing to seem rejecting or disinterested.)

I can only now remember the Chris Farlowe and Van Morrison incident on Thursday am. *[I had sought to open up a conversation about the 60s and my student days right at the end of my session when we were trying to move on to someone else]*

*(K: I was not there, and so have some trouble understanding what Judi is referring to here.)*

Several things about this all puzzled me:

- the self-orientation of your comments in the context in which they were said
- that you seemed not to be contributing to help the group manage time, but to be pushing against that
- that you might be contributing to a dynamic of not feeling engaged with (and as the time did slip several times during the two days, there was less slack time in which to have chatty conversations about people's lives anyway)

I did wonder afterwards:

- if you were trying a constructionist experiment of some kind!
- whether perceptions about gender were involved in any way

I will leave it there, and hope that we can discuss Chris Farlowe, van Morrison and other topics sometime in a mutual way.

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<sup>38</sup> In other words in preparation for writing the thesis I have collated the comments from the copies handed back to me in advance of the meeting in May.

I would appreciate your comments. Best Judi

Judi provides me with a description of what she has seen and invites my comments. She appreciates that my behaviour is not objective fact and needs exploring. It's not objective fact for me either. I'm prompted to think through what has happened. As I do, I access the turmoil of feeling that was associated with my "experiment", and start to try to make sense of it for myself as well as offering this interpretation out to Judi - and eventually to the rest of my group. I responded the following day: the 26 March 2002.

Dear Judi,

Thank you for saying something. I'm not sure I would have done on my own initiative but I think I should.

I have an idea of what was going on based on my experience and the way this connected to familiar patterns. It (my idea or theory about myself) continues to raise difficult questions for me about my adult functioning. These difficult questions do form part of my inquiry, but the territory is difficult to traverse.

Yes it does begin with something of a constructionist experiment. Well at least if you could give such a grand name to my experiment with form in my own session [*This was when I sat out and had the group speak about my work with me watching*]. I thought it up lightly without much consideration as a sort of clever thing to do. In fact the result caught me completely off guard, overwhelmed me and, it seems to me now, shaped my behaviour for the whole of the session. Learning here of course but at a cost.

(Judi: Yes)

The first thing to say is that, looked at in any rational sense, I don't think that my reaction is justified by what actually happened to me! You and S\_\_ responded to my paper in a way which was thoughtful and with the benefit of hindsight helpful and legitimately critical. It's what the combination of circumstances triggered. In particular the way I made myself helpless by putting myself outside the group, (C: *ah!*) and the unforeseen reaction to hear the group move from my text to my self. (as if they could be separated!)

But, and this I think is the key, the triggered emotional reaction to what was happening was of a terrible loneliness and sense of rejection based on being judged and found wanting. In this state what would have been quite small things, such as people not reading the paper, became magnified into further anomie: it comes to me as a desolation / isolation that is difficult to describe. A sort of arid desert.

(Judi: *I can see that possibility in you...& some sense of the bearing you have developed to stand firm even there.*)

The feeling is a rare but familiar one. It occasionally catches me like this, and I still struggle to see it coming or when it happens to bring my adult self to bear.

It's familiar because it is the same feeling that the ten year old Robert had when he was sent away by his parents to live alone with his elderly grandmother, and go to a strange school. In these circumstances I was lonely and had no one to turn to - that I could access in any event. I learned quickly and deeply to rely on my own resources and that these were to be found in my own imagination not in the outside world: there really was no succour there I concluded at the time. So my adult reaction can be to go diving inward and reject any attempt to help. It sounds a bit trite but it connects for me via an emotional history.

The problem is that offers to help or understand are usually addressed to the 53 old man, but it is a struggle to put him in charge of my emotional self at the time. In short the behaviour that puzzled you could be understood better as those of a hurt and sulky ten year old. Or perhaps more accurately as the struggle of a 53 old man to get to grips with his ten year old boy.

*(Judi: Yes maybe and there was a hint of attention seeking pushiness.)*

It is made worse by the fact that I feel ashamed to say this: it seems so....well, underdeveloped. That is a self sealing reaction which can make things worse.

*K: Underdeveloped? I am struggling with this description. Isn't part of our inquiry about reparation, I wonder? I have been so conscious lately, partly in conversations with colleagues about 'emotion work in consulting', how much of our own behaviour, and inquiry, and how much of what goes on in organisations is intimately connected with deep and early hurt, rejection, or whatever it felt like at the time... As consultant I am beginning to appreciate my own 'hurt' as a place from which I can meet people and appreciate their need for 'reparation' (Klein talks about that)... I can't quite write this well, again, find myself hoping we can have a conversation. For now I'd just like to say, don't take the pruning shears to this too quickly. It seems terribly important to me that you find a way to work with this that feels right for you, but I'd worry if – for fear of turning CARPP into a psychotherapy session – you omitted this deep reflection altogether. I think it is important in your inquiry...*

My non contribution to time keeping was I think made up of two things. One the sabotage of the ten year old punishing the authority who had rejected him (sounds childish, but it is if you see what I mean!). The other thing is that a part of me knew that the way out was to speak about this so I kept hanging on to moments of contact. When you spoke about CF and VM you were heading in my direction in more ways than one: chronologically you were heading to meet my emotional self, and also by revealing a bit of yourself you were showing me the way in another sense. But then we needed to get on.....and I couldn't quite bring myself to show the need that would have arrested everyone's attention. This is the "sought conversation" I was not seeking very well but which you intuited. My occasional references to nobody being interested in me or to people judging me I think need to be understood as me struggling towards a different sort of contact.

*(C: This is how I intuited that part of the conversation.)*

I have omitted a paragraph here, which is about others who I have not asked permission to talk about and who I do not wish to approach on this issue. I should not have included it in the original mail.

I hope you are not to dismayed by this. I realise we are not a therapy group, and I also realise you are not my mum!

*(Judi: No, & I could be a generational sibling with similar patterns I've worked on.....)*

My inquiry, which I think is the "justified" part of this, is to investigate how this idea of myself impacts my adult functioning, and to hold the theory of myself open to investigation and modification. *(Judi: Yes)* I am on the case here as I think is revealed in every piece of writing I have shown you.

*(C: Sounds here like you are justifying/defending yourself.)*

The shame that surrounds these reactions is a kind of self sealing bind and the first barrier to inquiry. I couldn't break through with you all when we met but I will continue to investigate ways to do this that are not self obsessive in the group. The challenge is to bring the inquiry into calmer waters and not only have it in the middle of a hurricane.

*(Judi: Or find disciplines that help you in the hurricane too. Don't think that you can calm it before you get there. C: eye? That's a calm place)*

Judi I have just gone over this again to make sure I am not saying anything I would be reluctant to say to the whole group . And there isn't. I have an idea to publish our correspondence to the group as part of my offering to our next session. Do you think this is ok? An alternate would be for me to include my note to you as part of a piece of writing I offer. Do you have an opinion? Part of my thinking is not to lumber you with private stuff which cannot be shared in the group as I feel this would place you in an unfair position given the nature of our task / relationship." (I sign my name to end the e mail.)

I would like to make one or two observations about my response to Judi before copying the response from Judi that closed this exchange. First is to notice that I respond to Judi in writing, which is the mode in which she first approached me. It is also a mode with which I felt comfortable; I was already beginning to present myself as a writer within this part of my life as a doctoral student. Nevertheless, Judi could have phoned me or asked to meet but she did not – she wrote, and in my response I pick up the form also choosing to write rather than to speak. With hindsight this seems a significant choice that helps to reinforce my existing inclination. After this e-mail exchange, there is a rapid acceleration in the volume of the written production I offer to supervision. Would it have been the same if Judi and I had met for a conversation about this incident?

I notice some of the qualities of the encounter with myself as they are noted in the mail. The way I seem to be caught by surprise by the loneliness that

arises within me; I “struggle to see it coming”, “I am caught by it”. Also by the way it seems to have insubstantial cause; the triggering event is not so significant for the others present for whom my behaviour remains a bit of a mystery. My feelings are troubling to me; also they do not arrive with a clearly defined meaning. I struggle to understand them as I respond to Judi’s mail. The feeling, and the memories with which they are associated, are not as sharply articulated as in thought; they exist as a “sort of arid desert”. In this sense the bodily state is more like an emotional resonance of loneliness; a suffusion of feeling, a sensual state, a colouring of my existence. I use these words to try to capture the vague power of what was arising. It is this vague, and in this sense “silent”, power that I then seek to articulate in words/thought. What does this ‘silent power’ mean?

When I try to account for its meaning with a story of my childhood I seem to be recognizing that something significant is happening to me. It is this feeling of significance that now interests me more than the particular explanation I provide. In what way is this significant for me? I seem to have understood that, however mysteriously, something profound was happening and that it did have something to do with my sense of identity and my relationships with other people in this situation. What is observed by Judi, and felt by myself, is present on the surface, in this situation, due to this coincidence of circumstances; also I feel it as touching the depths of my experience of my life. I believe that this feeling of significance had profound consequences for the whole doctoral endeavor, which kind of shifts on its foundations through the attention paid to feeling and identity in this chapter. At least with hindsight that is how it now appears; an advantage of the backward glance.

Focusing on the vividness and felt significance of this experience connects it to the Sparrow Hawk in the garden and my emotional responses to Alice’s illness: memory wrapped in feeling. Here though the feeling surge is complexified by its social setting. I am also, for example, having to work with feelings of shame that I could call myself a process consultant, espousing how I “say where I am when I get stuck”, and then stumbling into this place of lonely introspection. These would all constitute reasons for saying “No” to this arising, and no doubt there would be strategies that would at least tuck it quickly away, and maybe also ways of deadening myself as a form of protection at ever feeling like this. But my choice is to say “Yes”, and I can see how this leads me into “complying with” what arises. As Judi says I show some “*of the bearing you have developed to stand firm even there*” – in this difficult place. Being overwhelmed by an upsurge of feeling does recur throughout the doctorate. Searching for disciplines, such as writing, that will enable me to weather the storm does become a theme for me. C’s comment above (C: “eye? That’s a calm place.”) might also be seen as prescient, in the sense that I think I do start to find a secret way into the eye of the storm, as I open to what comes and allow it to wash over, and through, me by detaching myself slightly from the experience, while still staying in touch with it: the paradoxical movement of which I have already spoken - moving away in order to get



closer

Judi responds to me with this last mail in the sequence on the 27<sup>th</sup> March 2002, the day following my mail to her.

Dear Rob

I have enjoyed reading this. I have felt connected to you reflecting on that meeting and on your sense of self. And so I have felt another little step in getting to know you.... and there are alignments here, including the age bit. I was sorry not to be able to have that conversation about GM and VM more fully and indulgently!

I paused a bit over the paragraph 'I hope you are not too dismayed by this', although the sentiments it portrays are fine with me. It is not that easy to know what is in and out of research, in and out of therapy and so on....And CARPP6 is not a therapy group and I am not your mother. And your mother now is not that person back then (I have learnt this well - enough? – with my own mum and what I hold her back then responsible for ).

Last week at the meeting, I was working intellectually alongside the dynamics, finding the living explorations in connection and disconnection (my shorthand, so much more there) interesting. One way I seek to accompany my more affective learning self on its journeys is by also working the channel of 'what is this about?' - like the persisting and desisting debate, which referred to life choice questions as well as more overt inquiry and ideas. I feed that channel with reading and discussion, and see the relating process. So, I wonder if that might work for you.

And I have no problems with the possibility that at this life stage unaddressed parts of ourselves can emerge to be explored, now the resources are more available, lest they become unreconciled forever parts of ourselves. And there is no reason at all why these might not be part of the territory of a PhD. (C: Yeah!)

Interesting that the gossiping form [*My "experiment with the process of the Group which at one stage I referred to as permission to gossip"*] set up so much so early. And the 'consequences' give some indications about what we are asking when we invite people to learn, and they really start to do so and go out beyond comfort zones, or into inner stuff....

I wanted to write back to you about your note.

Now to your question. I am happy for you to share the correspondence with the group. I think it will be interesting to see how you frame and narrate that, because I guess people will want to be invited in in some way, not have it all presented as a projective 'test' - I mean like rorschach.

Must go, downtown to eat and go to the theatre. And unwind a bit for a few days easter break, it's been a long term.

Best Judi

In this exchange Judi continues to show herself, and to offer connection, as she inquires into what was going on for me; she speaks of her own mother and she offers an intimate image –being a “generational sibling”. At the same time she does not retreat or shrink from saying what she sees and feels; she notices a certain “attention seeking pushiness” for example. In so doing she encourages me to work through again what was appearing for me and to articulate it – with courage. I believe she is showing me a way of being with a difficult experience. In so doing she also indicates to me that the difficulty is part of the experience (she tells me not to expect to “calm the hurricane” for example), and she also says that she can see in me “some sense of the bearing you have developed to stand firm even there” which reassures and strengthens me.

*Reflecting on and consolidating my experience*

When I was writing this part of the thesis in October 2006, the emphasis being placed in the exchange of e mails on how I handled myself in a difficult experience, helped confirm the feeling that I remember having at the time (in 2002), that I had quite quickly, and in a way that was not fully comprehensible, made a problem of my life. It is hard for me to read the e-mail exchange without evoking again the slightly desperate feeling that suddenly the ground had shifted under me. I use the word “suddenly” advisedly because it did feel sudden – like a figure ground switch. I had entered the programme with great confidence, and the early adventures around my consulting work had been fun. Now I felt a kind of pit opening up. At the time I was confused, and, as I say I can still re-call this uncomfortable confusion and bleakness. Yet, with hindsight, re-creating my existence as a problem did lead into a radical review and provide the motivational energy for what was to follow.

Later I would come across something Merleau-Ponty said to his students at the College de France, which helped me make some (positive) sense out of the incident and the following e-mail exchange I have just described. Merleau-Ponty writes that when we “properly” enter into inquiry then we discover a deepening cycle, which leads us “to question further, more deeply, .....*life itself has become a problem*<sup>39</sup>” (Silverman, 1988: 12. Emphasis added). He goes on to say that this does not damage our life but enriches it “there is no misanthropy and hatred for life, but rather another love, a ‘new happiness’ - ‘Abyss’ and ‘regeneration’– Second innocence” Although I did not have this work to hand in 2002 I wonder now (October 2006) if in some way I was intuitively in search of ‘regeneration’ and ‘rebirth’? The language is a little flowery and a trifle excessive for my English tastes, but it is also bold and, for me at least, inspirational. It lends dignity to my confusion.

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<sup>39</sup> “We constantly give birth to our thoughts out of pain, and, like mothers, endow them with all that we have of blood, heart, ardor, joy, passion, agony conscience, fatality.” (Silverman: 10)

In her e-mail exchange with me Judi had recognized me for working “within the hurricane” and for having some qualities that enabled me to keep inquiring in the face of strong disruptive feelings. Not long before she had written about living “life as inquiry”:

Living life as inquiry means that I hold open the boundary between research and my life generally. Often, therefore, I am aware that a theme I am pursuing in research is also relevant to some other area of my life, and I will seek to work with, rather than suppress, that realization. (Marshall, 1999: 160)

Although Marshall is careful to make the point that inquiries that connect with our life are not bound to be joyless, she also recognizes that they might be testing. She specifies caution about including every moment of our lives saying that, “I do need to know when not to adopt a thoroughly inquiring approach and to leave life ‘unprocessed’” (ibid: 157), and she also warns against making ourselves too “vulnerable” (ibid 160). As I read this I realize that from early in the journey I was prepared to take risks with my vulnerability by showing personal aspects of my life even in an environment where I did not feel totally secure (see the next section). Can we ever feel totally secure? As I reflect on this I connect with the excitement and the feeling of substantial ness that comes from inquiring into my life – pushing against my limits. It seems to me that in 2002 I was resting on what I had become, and that this had qualities of being stuck. I was so solid and established that I needed to open up to my feeling states to shake me into new possibility. Part of the inquiry of this thesis is to re visit the events from 2002 to *explore what that motion of opening really means, and how writing might, in some fruitful way, be implicated in the process of exploration.*

The feeling of being set in motion by the events of the spring of 2002 lives with me still. How am I carving kind of a channel through the silt of my life? As I write these words now, in October 2006, my eyes moisten, bodily precursor to a memory of Alice: again I am bathing her tiny new-born body. She is submitting to it all with dignity. I swoosh the water over her and she twitches little arms and legs in response, all the while staring unflinchingly into my face – those eyes, that serious stare, have left their mark on my heart. Was this a first innocence? If it was then I yearn for a second one both for myself and for her. These words cause a gentle tug into tears. My feelings come to me without my deliberate thought, and I struggle to stay with them to write the way sadness is mixed with fond warm memory. I briefly weep and hold my head. I put my pen down and turn again to Merleau-Ponty’s text. I have an uncanny feeling that he has watched this, and that he now speaks to me directly, as he quotes Nietzsche again:

What is required for living is to stop courageously on the surface, to hold on to the skin, to adore appearance, to believe in forms, sounds, words, in the whole Olympus of appearance! Those Greeks were superficial – *out of profundity!*<sup>40</sup>

I collapse into tears again no longer clear whether it is for the memory of Alice, or because I am moved by the idea of “profundity on the surface”. I feel for that other me back in 2002. Not feeling sorry for myself then, but curious about how I seemed to follow a path without being able to articulate that path. In some ways I

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid

did seek profundity on the surface by trying to describe in words what was happening and being prepared to stay with the descriptive moment – not offering interpretation. Let us look together at the evidence for this claim in the next section.

### 3.2 Written contact....and detachment

In this section I show how I respond to the events described in the previous section by writing a poem, and publishing it to my supervision group. I resist too much interpretive effort, or contact with my group, around the poem. I seem to intuit that I need to both describe what is happening and to hold off from too much interpretation. From the overall story of the thesis, this section shows me withdrawing to attempt to describe the world as I am experiencing it. To do this I step back from interpretation and in doing so also step back from others. The two movements: stepping back from my own interpretative habit and from others seem to be necessarily correlated.

The tone of the poem is still heavily introspective but it also shows consciousness of the loneliness that accompanies my self orientation.

Before discussing the poem I frame it in the context of an overall surge in the volume and intensity of writing that occurred at this time in the Spring of 2002. How is my writing seeking “profundity on the surface” through a certain kind of articulation and sharing with others?

#### *I channel myself into writing*

It's October 2006, pour tea from a small blue tea pot into a pale cup decorated with the painting of an aubergine, take a sip of the tea, and carefully place the cup beside my lap top. I glance down at the keyboard, then up to the window. It is a dark early morning – still forty minutes or so before sunrise - then I start to tap slowly on the laptop, using the index and forefinger of each hand in an untutored and slightly clumsy fashion.

In the year that followed March 2002 I produced twelve pieces of writing constituting 130 pages of text, some of which were re-worked and re-submitted to supervision. All of this production was commented on by my supervisor, and sometimes by other members of the supervisory group. This was three times as much writing as had been offered in the first year of the programme. In this way the incident with the supervision group occurs at a time when I was engaged in an acceleration of the volume of writing I was producing. As I will explain this incident if anything supported this encouragement by reinforcing a kind of temporary alienation from the group.

In addition to increasing in volume my writing it becomes markedly *more personal* in tone and content, presenting a focus on more intimate aspects of my life as well as on what was idiosyncratic or different about myself. I seemed to be making an effort to present myself in a fuller and more rounded way to my group: as a husband, and a father with my own unique style and character. Personal revelations were not unusual in the supervision Group. What was more unusual was the consistent focus I was starting to bring at this time in 2002 to personal revelation *through writing*. For example M would frequently move us with highly personal stories but produced little writing. C wrote but did not pass all her writing through

supervision as I did. K and S produced writing for all of us periodically, but this was less frequent than mine, and increasingly focused on re working specific chapters in their theses (They were further down the road having started their doctoral studies before the formation of this supervision group). The writing produced for the supervision meeting on the 20/21 March was the most personal I had attempted to date. (Another reason why the process I elected to use was inappropriate). Why had I been inclined to see my doctoral journey as such an *intimately revealing* written journey? Why I was focussing on writing as the chosen vehicle to explore complex identity issues? Why had I not just raised my feelings directly with the group?

In part this is a function of my feelings towards the Supervision Group at this time. I was feeling distanced from them by certain aspects of my experience:

- One of the group members and I had a difficult relationship that we did not seem able to resolve on our own; all attempts a discussion seemed to make matters worse. This difficulty was left over from the MSc programme where we had been fellow students. I seemed to evoke in her all that was wrong with white middle aged, middle class men, while I felt resentful that I was being stereotyped.
- There were no men in the group at this time. There had been two other men at the beginning but one had left quite quickly while the other had gradually lapsed into not coming very often. This left five women and myself. I felt my minority status and this confirmed a feeling I had of being stereotyped – de personalised. Also the departure of the men from the group contributed for me a slightly fractured feeling to the group.
- Two of the group members (S and K) had transferred into our group from other supervision groups and were at a much more advanced stage in their doctorates than the rest of us – they were destined to complete, and to leave the group before those who were starting, as it were, from scratch. While not a major point it contributed for me to this “slightly fractured feeling”.
- Attendance at the group was slightly erratic, partly for the reasons given above. On the day in which the following incident unfolds Judi, myself, and fellow students C, M and S were present. K was not present on this day but she was otherwise attending regularly.

One consequence of this situation was that I was constantly disappointed by my own performance in the group at this time, and this just confirmed my feeling of discomfort. I felt stuck and I felt unable to follow my advice by simply saying where I was. I realise this might give rise to a wry smile: here is the process consultant unable to do for himself what he recommends to others. One of the reasons I keep returning to this situation is because of the lesson it gave me in what it really means to be totally embroiled in a situation. I’m in this, contributing to it fully and unable, apparently to break out. At one level it is one of the most significant learning experiences from the programme: at once sobering and gripping. Later when I’m trying to grasp what it means to be truly a part of a life world then I think back to myself, the supposedly skilled process consultant stuck like this. Even now

as I write these words in March 2007 I can easily re invoke the feeling of being tangled up – a slightly deadening loss of agency. I go and make myself a cup of tea!

This situation was to gradually resolve itself not, on this occasion by being directly addressed, but by the whole group just moving on. In my transfer from MPhil to PhD in January 2005 I wrote this about this time:

An important part [of my relationship to the doctorate] was the complex way I was interacting with my Supervision Group. At the time [2002-2003] I was the only regularly attending man in the group and I was having to tackle interesting challenges about how to find a place from where I could draw support. Most unhelpful was a tendency to see myself as carrying personally the burden of responsibility for the oft-cited failings of men in the world – especially middle-aged white men. Much of my writing at the time is an effort to establish my humanity in the eyes of the group (and myself) – to show that I love and am loved, that I am a person as well as the cipher I was choosing to interpret my self as. Gradually I came to articulate some of this to the group directly, and of course found that this shifted the ground of the group and of my self assessment in the PhD process. Buoyed up by a collective move towards more reflection on our own ways of going on, we have come to know each other differently, and we have come to talk differently with each other: out of this I have found more nourishment with my colleagues. This has slowly released me to bring a healthier energy to locating the source of my interest in the doctoral journey.

My perceived difficulties with my supervision group intersected my gathering interest in writing as a form of expression as I described in the last chapter. The choice I made was a determination to write, to write personally and to share the writing with my group. My choice was to not (at the time) address my feelings of alienation from the group directly, but to approach thoughtfully and more obliquely (than directly confronting them in the group for example), by offering a fuller, or at least a different, reading of myself. Literally a reading! Let us move onto examine how I worked with these feelings in writing, and what exactly it was that was offered. This will also involve examining what was offered back by supervisor and fellow students as a form of dialogue ensues around my text. In so doing I will also illustrate my experiments with the process of writing. Let us start by returning to the question, what happened after the e-mail exchange?

#### *I write a poem*

The following paragraphs introduce the poem I wrote, explain how I handled it at the time it was published in 2002 and subject it to retrospective analysis. I resist interpreting the poem focusing on the descriptive effort.

As I tried to make sense of my confused understanding immediately after the incident in my group I wrote a poem about my experience, which was published as a part of the paper I sent to them and then refined and re-issued on the 1<sup>st</sup> May 2002. Looking back on the whole sequence of events I'm inclined to see the poem as a continuation of my dialogue with Judi and my

supervision group – the dialogue that starts with the e mail exchange. I offer this thought as a framing device for the reading that will follow. Can we see a continuity of themes? How is the poetic form supporting their communication and further exploration? For example I have spoken of a feeling of loneliness in the e-mail does this poem now constitute a more effective way of *showing* that lonely feelings? I wrote the poem on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> March 2002.

*Palace*

*A cool breeze rustles through the palace of my being  
Setting ajar the doors of long forgotten rooms  
Where the dust rises in gentle, urgent clouds  
Among the decaying scrolls of memory.  
A shivering disturbance to nights ordered emptiness  
Reverberates through the palace  
As in the distance a door bangs a lonely beat  
In sad accompaniment to the whispering cold.  
What is written here in faded script?  
Tales of warmth, hope and desire  
From a time of different songs and warmer breezes.  
Should someone come and clean the rooms?  
Open the shutters, let in the light?  
No! Who could read the stories now -the script is ancient, the meaning  
lost.  
And the palace stirs to a new day's gentle hum  
And will soon be warmed by present sun (March, 2002).*

*(Judi: Moves me. Speaks to me)*

*(K: Is the meaning also made, again and again, as we visit those old  
rooms?)*

At the time I was ambiguous about offering any thinking through of the poem. I offered no explanation or interpretation of the poem at all in “Experimenting With Accounts” the written piece in which the poem was published.

*Creating a gap between description and analysis*

When I followed up with *Afterthoughts* on the 7<sup>th</sup> May 2002 I did make some observations, which I will re produce and comment on. Here is what I said in “Afterthoughts”.

I notice that I offered no reflections at all on the... poem ..... I simply felt reluctant to explain what I had created, wanting it to stand as a statement on its own. On reflection I think I could be more helpful in two ways. These are both context points rather than explanations of what the poem “means” to me *which I would rather not try to explain*: it seems here that it should stand (or not) on its own. (Afterthoughts, 2002: 1. Emphasis added).

I am mindful here of the discussion in the Introduction to the thesis about the difference between action research and artistic writing generally. You will remember that I suggested (following Van Manen) that one way to



distinguish between the two forms was that the action researcher accepted the challenge to explicate, whereas the artist was happier to leave the meaning latent as potency, rather than realisation. The 2002 commentary, added by “Afterthoughts” shows a reluctance to *think through* the implications of the poem, and a desire to stay with the description. I wonder if there might be circumstances when this would be acceptable for an action researcher? I can readily think of two: one would be where the action researcher wants to try and express something inchoate as part of a process of reaching for understanding, but if there was to be no explicit inquiry why publish? The second is where the action researcher publishes as an invitation to second person inquiry, as an invitation to help with the process of sense making. In respect of this poem I publish, but leave my audience uncertain about whether they are invited to join me in any sense making process. At this stage separating myself from others and distancing my description and interpretation seem to be correlated.

The implicit question in 2002 (the unasked question we could say – see chapter one) is, will providing some explanation of the poem spoil its contribution/impact as something expressive and feeling full? This suggests a separation between thought and feeling together with a concern that they might *at this moment* be incompatible. There seems here to be a desire to keep thought at bay so that feeling can emerge and be appreciated. Opening a space for feeling. I say as much when I go on in “Afterthoughts” to say:

..... whatever else the poem is it is also an experiment with form in an inquiry based account. Among other things I’m interested with how the poem does or does not contribute to the account both for me and for you.  
 ..... (*Judi: does speak some of the sense of the piece in another mode, more feeling – evocative.*) (*After thoughts: 2*)

At no time do I speak of “us” or of any joint processes. I speak of “me” and “you” separately. In the next section I will quote my supervisor and a fellow student both speaking explicitly about *not knowing whether they are being invited to comment*. It would seem at least plausible that my reluctance to *think through* the implications of the felt state, also amounts to a reluctance to enter into dialogue. In saying I don’t want an interpretation I also seem to be saying that I *don’t want contact*, or that I want to carefully modulate the contact. So can a publication under such reservations amount to a process of action research, or is it reserved for the poet in his garret?

Well on the one hand I do like Van Manen’s no nonsense distinction between art and social science, but I am also aware that the boundary is becoming increasingly porous. For example the latest edition of the Handbook of Qualitative Research includes a new article by Kathleen Stewart on “Cultural Poesis” in which she describes herself as seeking to describe felt emergent moments. I am drawn to the way that she describes what she is doing:

..... the writing here is committed to speculations, experiments, recognitions, engagements, and curiosity, not to demystification and

uncovered truths that snap into place to support a well-known picture of the world. I ask the reader to read actively – to follow along, read into, imagine, digress, establish independent trajectories and connections, disagree. ... I suppose the writing gropes towards embodied affective experience. (Stewart, 2005: 1027)

Stewart is unworried about having direct dialogue around her expression. She offers it out in the hope that it will stimulate the reader. By focusing on description – on attentional discipline- and not on uncovering or “demystification” is she providing a kind of response to the statement offered by Merleau-Ponty at the end of the previous section: what is required for living is to stop courageously on the surface?

I believe I can see Stewart paying attention to the fine-grained detail of the moments when things emerge and situations unfold, as being the *first movement* in inquiry. Things are emerging and unfolding for her. She stays with the sensual moments when her body experiences the acts of emergence. She defers her sense making in the same way that a gourmet will defer eating for tasting. In this move of staying sensually present she moves her writing closer to the source of emergence, whilst distancing or deferring her own sense making; in this double moment of detailed accounting, and refusal to speak she seems to me to open a space, and to stay profoundly on the surface. Am I intuitively trying to return to the first movement of inquiry as a way of reconfiguring myself?

I respond to this question with an image borrowed from yoga I have of helpfully stretching out, and deliberately slowing down a process. *Is it through stretching out and slowing down the movement from sensual encounter to sense-making that I can I honour affect?* This question seems to build on the type of understanding that was present when feeling states have been considered earlier in the thesis: for example the encounter with my daughter’s illness. What is being implicitly asserted in these accounts (think, for example, of the thoughts that surround the Sparrow Hawk incident) is a connection between thought and feeling that is circular in the sense of being mutually reinforcing. What is being added now is more detail about how writing might *open up the sensual encounter*, and also the importance of *not rushing too quickly into sense-making*. I wonder if this could be conceptualised as a development of the idea of writing as a bowl or hollow for emergence? I imagine that writing of the sensual encounter is the moment that opens the writing out – presents it as a bowl within which things, and situations, may be gently held. That the move to sense making is a kind of closing movement in the writing, during which things and situations are taken hold of more firmly?

This section shows how my reluctance to engage in interpretation with my supervisory group is part of a disconnection or detachment from the group. This “disappearance” of myself is not caused by the events of March 2002. These events merely bring to the fore a quality of my way of being in the world. I respond in my own distress by withdrawing – it is a familiar

pattern. The poem reveals some of the qualities that constitute this capacity for withdrawal. Reading the poem now it seems to me to resonate with three aspects of myself: a) loneliness; b) self-centred introspection; and c) a confused desire for contact and “warmth”. These features of my self are present throughout the doctoral journey. I have assembled into Exhibit 3.1 (below) examples from three periods during the research journey to illustrate this point. The feedback adds to the poem, observations on the consequences for others of being who I am. The painful last sentence from my wife, and the irritated outburst from my colleague C- “what is your purpose?” are particularly noticeable to me now. These qualities of myself do not leave me during the thesis – there is no “cure”. However, I claim that I do find a way of beginning to use my “disappearing” self in a more generative and healthy way. In part this has to do with transforming disappearance into a healthier detachment, which I then ally to a capacity for describing what is happening for me. The discovery of a new approach to writing was a significant start on the road to re-working my way of being in the world. In the following chapters of the thesis I will show how my expressive capacities are given further encouragement by the discovery of phenomenology, and how this changes the way in which I see myself in the world of others.

In the following sections I will provide further evidence to show that from the disturbances of mid 2002 I began to create some space within which to start to address fundamental aspects of how I saw myself as a person of and in the world.

**EXHIBIT 3.1: FEEDBACK ON DISAPPEARANCE**

November 2002. Feedback from colleagues in CARPP

November 2006. Feedback from Bridget Farrands

*First respondent:* I would not have said that you were not advocating your needs but that the way you did it was a bit more *attention seeking* sometimes. Not in a highly negative way but it was multiple. You were asking to be affirmed in a way that was sometimes difficult to do in the space that you chose to do it. The image (Pause) I have the feeling that this assertiveness before was held, and held, and held, whereas this last two times it feels as if this assertiveness has been made and held and released, and made and held and released. And that feels freer to respond to. And in that way before I would have said you advocated for what you wanted, *but at some process level or energetic level I was not sure what you wanted but now I feel I am clearer about what you want because of the energy phase in that*"

*Second respondent.* When you start to speak you hold my energy and I'm listening. Then I'm waning after a while, and *I'm wondering where is this going, what is he saying and then it's gone. Dissipated. I've lost attention. My attention is not as it was when you started.* I don't know why. (Conversation me and the world, 12<sup>th</sup> November 2002:9-10),

You have become more patient. More interested in what others have to say. Even if you don't agree with them. It's a powerful mode of contact with others.

You are more forthright with clients. Holding your authority more clearly about what you believe. Taking a stance and being able to defend a stance in ways they often find compelling.

Give very full attention – very affirming thing to be on the receiving end of.

*Disappearing psychologically/emotionally – I have found this hard to bear. I have disentangled myself from this.*

January 2005. Comments written on "Body and Process" paper by fellow student C

Ideas – what practical outcomes? For what end? Your learning? What do differently? *Making a difference with your clients? To what end? Where in your life?*

### 3.3. Voyeur?

Feeling, identity, emergence and writing weave together in this section preparing a rich ground for attempts at sense making as the section progresses. This weave also provides the ground for a surge of synthesis, which comes emotionally to the fore as the section concludes. In the journey of the thesis this section shows me beginning to re-configure my conception of my own identity as 2002 moved into 2003.

The section also shows me continuing to visit my old texts from 2002/3 and so addresses the question, *what is the current value of my own past productions; what value is there in re-visiting my own texts with a fresh eye?* The attempt to describe and also re-visit, or re-think, produces a layering effect where what was important for me in 2002 is set alongside, or overlaid with what is important for me now in the autumn of 2006. This adds dimensionality to the inquiry – a kind of thickness arising from the possibility of seeing similarities and differences through time; also I find that it produces overlap and ambiguity, so that separating what was then and what is now becomes difficult and requires particular attention to issues of continuity.

After I had written the poem I included it in a paper with other pieces of personal writing and sent it to my supervision group ahead of our next session on the 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> May. This included two accounts of aspects of my personal life that I had slightly modified from the draft produced for the supervision session on the 20/21 March 2002.

#### *Offering personal descriptions.*

The first extract is from the very beginning of the revised piece of writing I sent out on the 1<sup>st</sup> May 2002 following the events in my supervision group and the writing of the poem.. At the top of the first page Judi has inscribed two appreciative comments about the paper and then about the first three paragraphs: “V interesting paper”, and “fascinating evocative section” In the same place on her copy C has inscribed:

I found this much more exploratory and much more writing as inquiry than your previous pieces....I like it for being messy and less polished. I like the meandering nature of this....what, in retrospect have you learned from the writing process?

I found myself encouraged by these comments; they helped to shape my next steps and in this way played a part in shaping the direction of the whole journey. As I re-read them I remember a feeling of warmth and a sense that somehow I was heading in the right direction. C’s question also reverberates as I head on with my writing now: what *have* I learned from the writing process?

Also near to the top of the page opposite the first paragraph Judi offers these comments about the overall supervisory process:

Is there enough time for all of us to speak with each other? The evening helps - but Rob away some of it – keeps separate again. (Experimenting with Account: 1)

Clearly Judi is concerned to keep the overall CARPP process useful and available. The comment about me supports and verifies what I have said earlier about my detachment from the group.

### 1. Prelude

On this Sunday afternoon of March 29<sup>th</sup> 2002, it finally feels as though Oxford is shaking off another English winter. Well at least that is what the queue to enter the Cold Harbour public dump would seem to indicate. A half-mile line of cars backed up down the approach road to where it intersects the Abingdon Road, all with branches or bags of grass cuttings heaped into the back, or sporting small trailers with the contents of the garden shed finally cleared of a winter's accumulation. Having filled my car to bursting with the pruned detritus of last year's growth there is little point in turning round so I sit there fiddling with the radio, and that's where it happens.....

I start to play with the idea that all this pruning and clearing could be a metaphor for some part of my life at the moment. Well to be more specific with the CARPP part. What if I was to think of doing a bit of pruning and clearing in this particular garden? [K] *Did you think about any shoots /weeds in particular? Or just enjoyed playing with the metaphor?* Do I need to strip out some of the dead or weedy shoots to make way for the strong growth? I turn the radio off, slouch down into the driver's seat, and rein in my awareness, just leaving enough to allow me to clutch slip my way to a safe distance from the forested Audi crawling forward in front of me. (Experimenting with Account: 1)

[C] *"Are you the garden or the gardener or both?"*

[K] *Nice metaphor...gives a sense of new beginnings from a rich past. I notice that you write in the present, whereas I imagine you wrote this afterwards. I like the present tense here.*

This sense K gets that I am making "new beginnings from a rich past"<sup>41</sup> intrigues me afresh: there is, it seems to me, a sense in which I am trying to

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<sup>41</sup>I am drawn to a sense of the past having some dignity, some presence of its own. I wonder now if seeing the past only as a source of pain and constraint (a childhood memory that constrains the adult for example) is one way of denying the past its presence and dignity? If I denigrate the memory then I will want to exorcise it. I could allow the memory to turn under my gaze, and to show me other aspects could I not: the love that animated my parents as they sought to stabilise my education in the face of my father's peripatetic life for example?

Merleau-Ponty refers to the past as having the potential to be "mythic", and K's (historic) voice helps me to see more clearly what this meant. The past is "rich" *because* it has its own presence or stature; because it is not subsumed completely to a present. It might live on with the ambiguity that the passage of time invests in it,

do precisely this as I re visit my old texts. I am re visiting these old texts together with their commentaries in order to think again - to find “new beginnings”. This brief comment of K’s also combines with C’s question to take me back into the idea of being a gardener, and to think the connection between pruning and the identity issues being raised through my encounter with my supervision group. It seems to me that K goes straight to the purpose of pruning, which is to clear space for things to flourish. The relationship of the gardener to growth in the case of pruning is an indirect one. There is a surfeit of growth; the gardener has to make choices to cut out some of the growth for other growth to flourish. We might focus on the knife, but also on *the space being opened up* by the cutting. We might focus on what is cut away, or on *what then flourishes*. Both of these aspects are present in the way that I start to think about the metaphor as I “slouch down” into my car seat. However the thinking does not, on a current re reading, explore all the potential of the metaphor. I am reminded of the potential lying untapped within the metaphor by the comments of C and K. as I re visit the text.

The metaphor of pruning confers meaning in an open rather than a tightly proscribed way. I’m interested in the developing conversation around the text. I produce it, K comments, and then I publish my original production with K’s text, which provokes another round of comment from C. K reads into the metaphor a connection between “rich past” and “new beginnings”, which raises with C another reading of the metaphor: “are you the garden or the gardener?” Both these annotations supported me in looking afresh at my own text four years after I first produced it. Is this the sense in which metaphor opens a conceptual space; a hollow in which thought comes to be? Is that the space into which K, C and I step when across time we start to think together? (Lakoff and Johnson: 3)<sup>42</sup>

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but it does live on as a lost moment that was as once as “real” as my present moment is now: that surely is the sense in which the past may be “mythic”? If I was to only focus on the hacking away part of “pruning” then I might lose this sense of the richness and resourcefulness of the past that lies hidden in the metaphor of pruning. K helps me to see that the point is to find what has come to us from the past so that it might be given the space to flourish: this is what I take her to mean as this past voice of hers speaks of “new beginnings from a rich past”.

<sup>42</sup> Lakoff and Johnson support the connection between metaphor and concept when they say: “Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.” Gibbs provides a more experiential and embodied aspect when he says, “our understanding of metaphor is inherently constrained by our conceptualisation of experience.” Gibbs, R. W. (1994) *The Poetics of Mind*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press. P 248-249 I take this to mean that it is our embodied experience of our world that invests meaning into metaphor and makes understanding possible. If you do not have a garden or have never pruned then you will not originate the metaphor and you will be unlikely to understand the possibilities inherent in the metaphor. The metaphor occurs to me because I have just been pruning in my garden. K knows enough about gardening to understand the metaphor and to associate it with growth and life not just cutting back plant life. Ambiguity is bound to be present in metaphor because it is inherent

I want next to consider another aspect provoked for me by the pruning metaphor, which will also engage me with the remaining pieces I wish to quote from this writing of May 2002. This aspect concerns the “cutting out” quality of pruning. What has to be cut away in relation to my identity and is it right to focus on the “cutting out” aspects of pruning?

### *Opening?*

These paragraphs fit into the thesis by showing the way in which the movement initiated by the problems in my supervisory group start to resolve themselves into a self-critique and a distancing from myself. I describe and detach in order to make space.

As I speak about my intimate life in the piece that follows I seem to do it in a rather detached way. The first person style develops something akin to a third person feel. I think that I could be narrating the events in someone else’s life. This is a rather strange thing to say and it’s hard to conclusively prove it to be true, but what is it that leads me to say this? What I would like to do is to look first at the extracts and then return to the question, then you and I will have something we can look at together. Here is what I wrote for my supervision group. Just to remind you, this was written after the poem, and after the pruning piece. It was sent with those pieces in the paper *Experimenting with Accounts*. I am going to quote quite a long piece, because I want to provide a chance to feel the atmosphere produced by the text as well as see the style being used; this will support me then in what I want to say afterwards.

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in the way our body engages with the world: “Actions, events, and objects are understood in terms of “experiential gestalts” (i.e. structurally meaningful wholes within experience).” (ibid, 249) In line with the way I have been thinking this thesis I would say that my body experiences the garden and the motions of pruning first as a felt experience, which is a whole experience – it cannot be broken down further without moving into the arena of thought – we cannot fracture our feeling into parts; as a stage towards analysis my mind grasps the embodied experience vaguely as a metaphor. I read Judi as making these connections from her brief note in which she associates metaphor, preparing to do inquiry and the “struggle” to describe experience.

Judi makes a comment here about this piece of writing which helps me to think around the connection between metaphor and concept: “? *reflections on what is going on when we put pen to paper & struggle (metaphorically) to give an account of something.*” Then underneath “*is doing inquiry?*”, and underneath that: “*Feels=preparing to do inquiry rather than doing it – so how is & isn’t the writing inquiry?*” The quite dense cluster of questions seems to me now to connect writing, metaphor and preparing to do inquiry. Am I in this piece “preparing”? Is this the significance of the metaphor – that it opens a preparatory space for in inquiry? How is the metaphor of pruning the opening of a conceptual space? I think also the metaphorical content of the poem, and reflect on the possibilities here.



## BLACKBIRD

Outside on the lawn two magpies forage for nest building equipment. Amazingly black and white in the dappled sunlight, pecking at leaves and dead plant life. "One for sorrow, two for joy." Let's hope so. Now a black cat slipping under the bushes, but in a flash of monochrome the birds are gone.

It's a Sunday morning, the 7<sup>th</sup> April [2002] to be precise. Bridget is at the gym; no one else will be up for a while yet. I have the quiet house to myself.

I woke this morning to the sound of birdsong, finding myself spooned around Bridget. I pull myself closer slipping my left arm over her left arm, resting my hand on her right shoulder. She murmurs and nestles her backside into my groin. I put my lips to her left shoulder and smell her smell. The familiar body. Is this as close as I can get physically? I keep quite still, wanting no movement at all. Feeling the contact as a re-charge of energy. A precious, vulnerable moment. Vulnerable because I know it will go if we move. I notice her breathing. She has a different rhythm to me, faster on the out breath and slightly quicker in overall pace. I synchronise my breath with hers. She murmurs and rolls on to her back. I notice my irritation like a buzz of electricity in my head. "Gym" she says shortly followed by "time?" I lift my left hand from her shoulder and peer at my watch "five past eight" I respond. "Mmmm. Nice here..... Gym!" she says. I nibble her left shoulder. "Gym" she says. I roll to the left disengaging my limbs from hers as she rolls to the right out of our bed. I curl back into the warm space she has left, and my mind floats free in one of those early morning reveries.

K comments: *Dear Rob, I noticed my hesitation in reading the above. It is a beautiful description of an intimate moment. And I know that my hesitation comes from knowing you and Bridget (if this was a part of a novel I'd just enjoy it, without scruples) but knowing you only at 'the periphery' as it were. It feels a little like peering curiously into someone's house, just to get a sense of the layout, and suddenly finding myself looking at a domestic scene, unexpectedly... and feeling an intruder against my intention... And I find myself thinking of your pruning metaphor again and thinking that this seems to me what usually get pruned in accounts I have read from you in the past. Curious.*

C comments: *I didn't feel that hesitation. I liked the everyday ordinariness of the moment.*

[My attention] goes to two months previously. In the doctor's surgery: cold be-gloved hands prodding and stretching the skin of my torso and then examining my scalp. "Well most of this is nothing to worry about but the skin is damaged" he says. "Should I see a specialist I inquire?" "Well if you don't trust my opinion..." So then I'm apologising "no, no, not at all" at the same time as I wonder about why I'm apologising. "Have you been exposed to a lot of sun?" he asks. I remember and recollect for him my adolescence on the beaches of Aden, airlifted out with other school kids to spend holidays with our parents. Except we never saw our parents from one day to the next, nor wore anything other than a swimsuit as far as I can recollect. That was "Revolver" time I think. "Eleanor Rigby" and wasn't "Doctor Robert" on that LP? I resist the temptation to try and hum it, and Doctor Green intrudes: "Has this one got any darker recently?" he asks prodding a mark on my temple. "Just a bit" I say. "Mmm.."he murmurs, returning to his seat and looking at me. I return his gaze

expectantly. He reaches into a draw and takes out some sheets of paper, leafing through them before slipping one out of the bundle for us both to examine. "Efudix cream is used to treat certain skin conditions caused by abnormal cell growth including different types of keratoses, keratocanthoma, Bowen's disease and some simple skin cancers." "It's a mild chemotherapy" he says, just put it on twice in one 24hr spell each week and come back in about three months. Make sure you wear gloves to apply it and only put it on the mark." "OK" I say giving a good impression of casual – as though this was a conversation about someone else's body. I make some remark, which I cannot remember, but I remember everything else about that moment. The smell of his plastic gloves, the picture of cows in a field drawn in improbable colours by his seven year old daughter, and his business like briskness. I think of Alice and her drawings of cows. Help me Alice.

I curl over in the bed. That was a first time: a first for that C word and this body to be associated. I wonder if this is the English way? Politely understated. Will they soon be hacking bits out of me leaving me wondering: "Just how did I get to this point? When did it start?" Enough! I roll out of bed and slip on very smelly yoga clothes, peep outside at the sun and wind, grab an extra sweater, and head for the garden. "Tell me that you've got everything you need dum di dum, but you don't get me, and your bird can sing dum di dum"

Body again. Tight, stretched in Samasthiti, seeking control of my breath after the Suryanamaskaras. Regulating the out and the in. Come on! I feel my feet on the mat and stretch out my toes. The wind cools my face. I should move into the standing asanas, but I grab an extra breath. Then my blackbird is on the terrace with me, hopping about pulling away at dead leaves for a nest I presume. I keep my breath rasping through the back of my throat but otherwise hold my body still. The blackbird hops into the flower-bed, grabs some bark and flies off. I jump my feet shoulder width apart, reach down and grab my big toes..... (Experimenting with Account: 6) (I have omitted the next paragraph)

*K comments: "Again, I get to meet a different Rob here, from the one I've so far met at CARPP, and I can't but notice my reticence. I also know that I am perhaps more sensitised because I have just come back from John's father's funeral, and so families and their personal histories are a little raw at the moment. Your very personal account makes me aware of my 'state' at the moment, and all the memories I've been through in the last few days, including memories of my mother and her slow and painful demise. And I find myself wishing I could have a conversation with you ... not sure if this is of any interest, but thought I'd share it in the spirit of shared inquiry."*

In my original text the first four paragraphs take up a whole page. Ringing this page like a picture frame are my Supervisor's comments; picture the commentary in blue ink starting at the bottom left and spreading to cover every margin:

*Judi comments: "Start here. I am engaged in this section enjoying the quality of writing & attention slightly unsure about where you are taking me & how revealing it is ----- whether I am meant to know this then about you as person----- or somehow not acknowledge it.. Just as you have mentioned things about choices & B[ridget] in the past & somehow it is not in the realm where I can ask – "and how are things?" when I would be happy to, if its not too intrusive. And I feel sympathy & concern re the skin cancer & C mentions-----"*

*--where are the boundaries? How are you creating them? Similar Q to mine after last CARPP about being self – revealing but not in a situation when I feel I can respond."*

Let me return to the question I posed as I introduced this piece: where do I see detachment here? In response let me acknowledge that I see - and I invite you to see an opening and an offering of myself. It makes sense does it not to see this as evidence of trying to show a broader me? In so doing I am introducing into the inquiry group other aspects of myself. Moreover I do so with quite intimate material do I not? My wife's backside in my groin, smelling her, synchronising our breath; then the close description of the doctor's surgery; it all seems to be shouting out, "hey I'm human too". But. There are I think elements of detachment here also. I think I can see myself offering and holding back, opening and closing, connecting and detaching. How am I detaching and from what? How is this dynamic a dynamic of inquiry?

Most obviously I am offering this piece without any encouragement to my group to get involved. There is no framing, no explanation of why these pieces are being produced, and no invitation to enter. As a result they feel unsure about whether they should enter to comment or to ask questions. They are being in some sense pushed, as K notices, into the position of voyeurs. Kept on the outside looking in. The obvious point about this is that it speaks to all the uncertainties of my relationship with the group. Yes, it does, but there is I believe more. What?

#### *Looking in on my own life*

Re reading the piece I am left with an uncomfortable feeling. The piece seems to me to also place me in an ambiguous relationship with the writing. The description of being in bed and of being in the surgery pays a lot of attention to describing what is happening almost as if I was a voyeur myself, watching from outside of the window, or sitting in a corner of the surgery. As I have said it is not the whole story. The piece does seem to flicker into a different life when, for example, I start to describe what I feel for my wife as we nestle into each other. However, there are whole strings of unaddressed questions littering the text to do with my felt responses. If I am so cool and detached about what the doctor says why the "Help me"? Was I also afraid? Why do I not say this directly? Why does the turn to first person direct speech (the "Help me, Alice") feel such a jolt? Why do I leave all the questions about how serious etc unanswered? Then what is really going on in bed? You probably are not much interested, but am I? It is as if I am *playing with the idea* of being in bed with Bridget. As I have said the point is not completely convincing when argued like this because the writing does have its moments; nevertheless, as I read it again, I am left with a feeling that I am describing something in large part (i.e. it is significant) from the outside. Why does this seem important now?

Let me return to K's metaphor of the voyeur. A voyeur would be someone who deliberately looks in onto someone else's private life. K complicates it

slightly with her example as she describes looking in for one purpose (to see the room layout) and coming across something unexpected that induces some further feeling state – it might be shame at having looked in the first place, or it might, I guess, be something more akin to fascination laced with guilt. The feelings of “guilt” and “shame” seem to me to arise from the observer feeling their own strangeness. They do not have permission, they are prying; perhaps the other being observed would not want to be seen like this? As I look again at the metaphor I connect with the other essential aspect of being a voyeur, which is the strong image of an outsider looking in. Thinking with K now encourages me to turn a quizzical eye towards myself: how am I voyeur to myself? It seems to me that the offering *onto the page* of these aspects of myself is an important aspect here. I publish them and as I do I detach them from myself. I could have spoken them in conversation and this would have had some of the effect of opening myself up; however a conversation would keep me in closer contact with what ensues. I am present to correct “misunderstandings” etc. The *writing* of these intimate pieces seems to place them at a greater distance from myself – to open more of a gap. They float into the world beyond my ability to control how they are received – in this sense they are more of an offering because they are written. Why though do I not just keep the description as private writing? What is the significance of publishing? It seems now, as I look back, that it was important that I was going further in giving these intimate elements of myself an independent status. Through *publication* they acquire more of an independence, which enables a more detached stance towards myself. Is this the sense in which I can become voyeur to myself; in which writing helps me to detach from aspects of myself?

There is another aspect of being a voyeur that I would like to return to in a moment, but before I do I want to reinforce the theme of detachment from identity a little more. The seeing of myself from a distance that I have described above seems to me to correlate with an increased awareness that I am not transparent to myself; that my reasons may be only partially known to myself. I have spoken of this already in the thesis, most recently when examining the exploratory aspects of the poem, which gains its epistemological value from the fact that it expresses more of the ambiguous state that precedes clear understanding (“...not the kinds of things you can get your hands on or wrap your mind around, but .... things that have to be literally tracked .... to begin the labour of knowing.” (Stewart: 1040-1041)). If my reasons were clearly understood before I acted then there would be no need for self-reflection. I would understand exactly why I acted as I did because, in this sense, I am already detached from myself. I do not know myself and cannot completely eliminate the ambiguous penumbra that surrounds my action in the world. Part of the reason for this ambiguity around my own reasons is that that my behaviour is not completely a function of my own reason. As this thesis has shown I am coming to a fuller understanding of the way in which *my reason is entwined within my relationships and my situation*. As my experiences with my movement to tears or to poetry have shown, and as Merleau-Ponty and Rilke have helped to illuminate, this situation includes a feeling-full connection to a world that

far exceeds my comprehension. In this period of the doctoral journey I come to glimpse *how I am a creature of the world and not of "myself"*. This growing realisation stimulates my search for resources that might help me to understand this more fully.

A part of this is to turn away from myself as a relatively fixed identity and begin to see myself as thoroughly situated with others. Phenomenology helps me to bring together the understanding that whilst things emerge *for me* they are also *for themselves*; have a dignity and independence of their own. I wonder if an intuition about this is what leads me to keep reporting my glances up out of the window and the natural world I see there? Does some part of me recognise a home there with the blackbird as well as here in with my "I"? Not only recognise it, but somehow know that this will be in some way important? Writing this is accompanied by a quite small but significant surge of feeling; my eyes moisten slightly, and I have feeling of warm realisation that sends my clumsy fingers punching away at an increased rate. Is this a felt accompaniment to a moment of synthesis within the thesis? I am for me, for you and for the world. I cannot know myself fully. To believe that I could is to not understand my situation. To believe that I am a fixed entity to be uncovered would be to similarly misunderstand. What is discovered is not a failure of understanding (i.e. of self) but a realisation of being a part of others in a social world, and of nature also. In a deeply significant and profound way I am not and cannot be alone; to believe such a thing possible is to commit an ontological error. There, I have kind of splurged it out of me! I have raced to the end. An end I did not know until this moment of short sentences; adamant advocacy. What does it mean to push this out, fighting back the tears?

I have to go on and unpick some of this. Explain it. What do these punched out statements mean to me? How have they arisen from my inquiry? How will they become incorporated into practice. To do this I need to go deeper into how Merleau-Ponty helped me to understand my situation in a cultural and a natural world by introducing me to phenomenology; also to show how this very movement towards understanding was an intertwined movement that involved friends and colleagues, feeling as well as thought. I feel impelled by my commitment to action research to struggle to show and tell the journey – the process – as well as the destination; and in so doing to acknowledge what is implicit - that "destination" is in fact a "way point" on a continuing journey. I notice this late coming feeling of synthesis in the previous paragraph. What came next in my journey as 2002 moved into 2003/4 suddenly makes even more sense.

### 3.4. Writing/re-approaching others

This closing section shows that my move towards detachment was not the only direction my inquiry was taking during 2002/3. The same descriptive attentional disciplines I was using to help me detach from a particular self-configuration, and fixed relationships, were also being turned towards trying to gain a richer conception of how others were also situated in the world. How could I connect with others from a distance? How could I break free from a narrow conception of others and see them more in their total situations?

What are the revelatory possibilities of writing when it comes to other people or events. I want to show my technique of showing myself through my writing being deployed in writing about others. I am going to use writing to try to evoke feeling; to try to enter the feeling space of another. When I first wrote this in the Autumn of 2002 I referred to it as “projection”, but now I wonder at the choice of words. “Projection” implies that I am just putting into the other what I am myself. The ontological stance that would go with this would be one of separation: I am a separate being who cannot know other directly. I can only know by analogy as it were – which is surely what projection is? This seems to me now to be a partial truth; moreover a dangerously partial truth. Why is it partial and why is it dangerous?

It seems partial because it denies or backgrounds, at least, what we share. Merleau-Ponty will have more to say to me about this in the next chapter. For now we can notice that we share certain physical relations to the world: up, down, front back for example. We take these for granted but they must surely feed a shared sense of having a future that diminishes in clarity with distance and a receding “back side” that also diminishes with distance. We also know from our earliest experience that there is a world of common objects with characteristics that others share with us. The hot fire is hot for others as well as me. The crunch of the thunder evokes a touch and an expression from my mother that tells me she understands my startled jump. As a child I wake to see a barn owl on the windowsill. I cry out in fear and the owl takes flight; I know startle and I know flight; and in that moment of flurrying movement the owl seems to know what I know; *we, the owl and I*, know fear. Does “projection” do justice to the shared sense of being in a world together? This is a question that I will investigate more fully in the next chapter. Let me here show how I was working with this theme back in 2002 before I even knew what phenomenology was or had any inkling about Merleau-Ponty.

#### *Describing another*

Here is a piece I wrote in November 2002 about a member of my supervision group, who I choose shall remain anonymous in this account. On this occasion my colleague is feeling overwhelmed and shows it by gently crying in the supervision session. She does not want to spend time with us exploring exactly what is going on with her. She just shows herself,

gathers herself, offers a brief explanation (which I don't repeat here), and we all move on. The parts of her situated ness I try to deal with in this brief piece is her feeling self – *the way she is situated in her own body*. Here though is the extract, which shows me trying to *detach myself from myself* by trying to float into the body of another, and in so doing making some attempt to move from my *thought about* my colleague into a *feeling of* her. This is the kind of third person description we might find in a novel where the novelist has the omniscience of being the creator; it is, I submit, unusual to see it in the context of action research.

[She] sat still in the dying light of the January day and began to cry. Gently and with dignity she permitted the tears to flow holding her body and face intact: no shudder or collapse. She held the competing pressure of human and professional interest unto herself, tightening her abdomen, controlling her mouth, feeling the tensions unwinding with liquid pressure, like an old mill wheel. Finally she breathed and offered some explanation to the patient watchers spinning a cause out of her own tiredness within the context of the rich and strong experience of the day. We breathed with her and began to speak. (Writing the Self, and Other: Appendix)

Judi writes alongside this a question. "Any link to street child's in ability to see all or any of situation?" This referred to another piece of the writing where I had explored this type of writing to try to understand more fully someone (a street child in Sao Paulo), who could not speak to me about the extent of her feeling state<sup>43</sup>. Judi's question provokes the connection I made above between not knowing ourselves and not knowing others; to the similarity in the situation of self and other. She reinforces this at the bottom of the page when she offers the question: "can any of us see beyond our own frames?"

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<sup>43</sup> "As the afternoon sun moved higher so S migrated with the other children from the giant tip into the relative cool of the city streets. As she slipped warily past the plate glass of the Central Bank she was caught by the reflection of herself; matted violent hair, torn dirty slip and pale face. Momentarily transfixed she saw her mother in the face that stared back. The ensuing wave of sadness passed quickly, aided as it was by the growl of the approaching security guard..." (Writing the Self, and Others: 12).

In Writing the Self and Others I also produce my inspirational source. Here is Henry James describing a woman waiting for her father:

"She waited, Kate Crory, for her father to come in, but he kept her waiting unconscionably, and there were moments at which she showed herself, in the glass over the mantel, a face positively pale with the irritation that had brought her to the point of going away without sight of him. It was at this point, however that she remained; changing her place, moving from the shabby sofa to the arm chair upholstered in a glazed cloth that gave at once – she had tried it – the sense of the slippery and the sticky." (Writing the Self, and Others: 13)

The attention to detail reminds me of Stewart's injunctions to pay attention to the emerging detail. It seems amazing to me how much James crams in about the life world of this woman. We can sense in her slightly haughty distaste for her father's chair something of her attitude towards him.

This piece has an interesting history. I was unsure about writing it and certainly about publishing it. I did produce it for a supervision group session in November 2002, but produced it late so that it had not been read properly when we met. Subsequently I erased this piece as I re worked another version of the writing, because I felt uncomfortable with its personal description of someone else. My colleague subsequently sent it back to the group with her own comments. Why was I “uncomfortable” about writing and publishing this piece? It seems to me that hesitancy might be based on the narrow line that I am treading with this type of writing: there is a risk that what I am presenting as detachment from myself is simply a colonisation of the other. This is the value of the “projection” account to which I referred earlier. In this account I assume my own feelings and thoughts into my colleague, and in this way deny her difference – this emphasises the need to check back and validate with the person being described. There seems to me to be no complete answer to this. We may know something of the other, but, even more than with ourselves, this is ambiguous. How would I know if I was denying or facilitating the difference of the other?

Part of the answer seems to lie in the way this piece came to life and was sustained. I show it to my colleague, she comments, I withdraw, she brings the piece back. The offering is tentative and the writing is available for dialogue. It seems to me that the implicit respect and consent are what validates this mode of writing in the context of action research. My colleague consents to its publication by retrieving it, she comments on it and in this way contributes to the sense making that goes with the piece. The writing involves objectification of her and she has to consent to this when working within the action research frame; put another way this is what validates it.<sup>44</sup> This is not the whole story though as I say above. My colleague does not “validate” what I offer against a completely known set of reasons about why she is crying in that moment. As she acknowledges in

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<sup>44</sup> There has been a recent (September 2006) flourishing of this type of writing in relation to public events. The playwright Peter Morgan has explored the limits of dramatic licence as he has portrayed events, which are private, but have public significance such as a private meeting between Gordon Brown and Tony Blair on the premiership of the country (“The Deal”), or where the personal motivations and feelings are hidden but important (“Frost/Nixon”). In this writing the author relies on published records and documents to found a fuller inquiry into the personal encounters that includes detailed descriptions of interpersonal dialogue that are fiction. The audience is helped to think the relationship between the wider and current political situation (in the case of Brown and Blair) and the personal relationship issues. Such a strategy is not unusual in fiction generally but it is more unusual to see it done with living people. If it were fed back to the protagonists and if their comments were made part of the drama then would this found a claim for the drama to be action research? It seems to me that it might well do so. Of course if they refused permission to publish then this would present the researcher with a dilemma. I submit that there would be no hard and fast answer to how to respond to such a refusal. It would depend on their grounds and also on the total situation (e.g. these are politicians living, to a considerable extent, in the public domain).



conversation she does not fully understand why she cries then. Her own views about why she acted as she did, if they were offered, would be open to challenge or to alternate explanations. There is a gap in her understanding and it is this gap that provides a point of entry for my *writing of her*. I offer my own felt sense of her back to her.

In the example I have just given I sought to enter the field of my colleague's felt experience and to sing back what I experienced. I struggled with the language that might express this – that might be *adequate* to the experience. As I struggled I found myself describing the world as I thought it was appearing for her, occupying, as I did, an ambiguous hinterland of possible shared experience. The light is “dying”, the watchers are “patient”, and, with even more licence, the other group members start to “breathe with her”. If I paid attention sufficiently, I seemed to be saying, then I could notice what is shared between us. Did these things not provide a common ground for us? Is it the *world as it emerges* that offers the chance of connection for us – does it then emerge *for us* in some way? In my attempt to describe her world I felt the shared world as an opportunity for contact. What does this mean? Can this shared nature of existence enable us to say that we are not alone? Is to say we are alone then to fail, quite literally, to understand *our situation* in the world. Perhaps it is our mind that removes itself into a lonely vigil of over sight? While our feeling body always “knows” its part-ness? These kinds of questions are still alive for me now, but they were first emerging in this form back in 2002. In the next stage of my doctoral journey I came to understand identity as less about a set of ideas and concepts, in the sense of relatively fixed traits or mental frames, and more about my involvement in the world as a historic and situated being. In this next stage I was increasingly supported by Merleau-Ponty towards a new intellectual understanding of what this might involve..

### *Looking Ahead*

What Merleau-Ponty adds to my understanding of my identity is an account of identity as an embodied habitual performance – a *style of being* that is a function of bodily engagement with the cultural and natural world. For me this brings identity out in to the light of day where it can be seen as a function of the complex situation that has historic and “in the moment” aspects. It also provides, what I found to be an enlightening account of stable pattern as well as local responsiveness in relation to identity. I am not totally unpredictable and nor is anyone else that I know. It is not as if each situation reveals a completely unique response from myself. How do I account for these familiarities and repetitions in my way of being in the world? Squaring an answer to this question with the continuing development of a more “in the world”, or “on the surface”, explanation of human being is one of the main themes of the next Chapter.

I feel as though in the period documented in this chapter I have been “pruned back” to reveal some of my deeper foundations, and that in the course of this a lot of my comfortable competency had been challenged. It seems that at this stage of my life my competency is at best a mixed

blessing. There is a risk that my ability to cope with most things is itself a barrier. How might I be decentred? Opened up to the richness of existence? Stirred afresh out of comfort and competence? Make some room for new growth, new life? I emerge from the experiences described in this chapter confused and bewildered. (I am still gripped with feelings of shame and exhaustion as I think of this period.) I approached the summer of 2003 putting one step in front of the other, but without really knowing any larger purpose. Yet, of course, this is not the whole story. I also feel that what I have shown in this chapter is that I was also preparing/being prepared. New things can only come if some space has been made ready, and this “making ready” cannot be a perfectly smooth process. What was it that then came?

## CHAPTER FOUR: Re- thinking my situation in the world

### Introduction

In Chapter Four I continue to inquire into sources of energy and excitement in my life, although now with a particular focus on the energising effect of ideas and concepts. How can ideas bring new interest and sources of energy into a life? How is it possible for new ways of thinking to cut through the accretion of habitual practice that constitutes a life? Put a little differently, how do new ideas *find purchase* in an established, and, in many ways, successful life? Questions such as these are the main concern in this chapter of the thesis. In the process of the overall doctoral journey this was a time of exciting encounter with my past and a possible future. I felt more purposeful as I struggled with Merleau-Ponty's, frequently difficult, texts, and also revisited some equally difficult texts from the history of Gestalt psychology. My interest in Merleau-Ponty began to spread more generally into phenomenology as I became interested in his friendship and disagreements with Sartre, his connections with Husserl's thought, and how he was being recognised (or not) currently. I was determined and resilient in the face of my own low levels of familiarity with existential phenomenology, borne along on a conviction that this was important for me. I felt as though I was feeding the ground of my life, investing concepts and ideas that would support fresh practice, and new interests, without knowing exactly what these were. I felt as though my doctoral studies were becoming more central to the flow of my life.

Although the Chapter focuses on my engagement with ideas I also describe how my intellectual interests were deeply connected to people in my life. The first two sections of the chapter are committed to an explanation of the way my connections to new ideas were socially enabled. The *first section: Phenomenology and my life*, describes how my engagement with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology derived from connections with existing colleagues and friends, and goes on to show how I develop a connection to the person as well as to his ideas. Above all else this first section demonstrates the connection between my newly arising interests in phenomenology, and my life with other people. The *second section: Gestalt and friendship*, continues this theme to show the connection between my Gestalt interest and people in my life. This includes showing how my initial engagement with Gestalt succoured me during a time of personal stress. The section also shows how my engagement with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology influences what I take as important from my Gestalt background, as I increasingly focus on the core Gestalt idea of a figure against a ground. In the *third section: Ground as world* I develop this interest further and show how my intellectual interests led me to re think the nature of my existence in the world. This section concludes with an attempt to synthesize my understanding of how "I" am situated - not inside myself, but in the world, and describes attempts to explain my new realisation to others. In *section four, Exploring ground in my consulting*, I describe a way in which this growing realisation was taken into my consulting by describing the case of

‘W’ from late 2004. This case demonstrates my attention on being situated, and also a connection between sensual knowing and being in the world. More personally I also notice how the design of the case distances me from the client. In the *final section: Experiencing, inquiring and knowing*, I synthesise my growing intellectual understanding using a model as a basis for inquiry and clarification. This is accompanied by personal turbulence as I am moved to ask further questions about my own use of self, and in particular my apparent detachment.

The chapter shows the interweaving of my thought and my life from several dimensions. The way my thought was embedded in social connections; the way my personal relationships supported new thinking; also how my attachment to new ideas was facilitated by personal feeling - even in respect of the dead author, and philosopher, Merleau-Ponty. It also shows how the relationship between sets of ideas proves to be fruitful to me as my existing base of knowledge interacts with the new thinking offered by phenomenology. This interaction creates a new way of seeing what I already knew and shapes how I take on what I am learning as new.

#### 4.1. Phenomenology and my life

In this section I show an energetic reciprocation between my intellectual interests and my life world. I show how energy arises from the interaction between intellectual and social aspects of my life. Important decisions are made concerning the direction of my research journey based on contact with friends and colleagues. This section contributes to the thesis by showing how I came to engage with phenomenology, particularly the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, and how this engagement was entwined with aspects of my life. I also show how writing continues to enable the growth of new sources of interest in my life.

The starting point for this Chapter in terms of the history of the doctorate is the Summer of 2003 a year after the events in my supervision group that inspired much of the reflection in the last Chapter. Why am I choosing to focus here? To start to address this question I want to quote from something I started writing in November 2004 and which I took through a number of revisions with my supervision group before submitting a crafted version to complete my transfer from MPhil to PhD in January 2005. The piece is called “Body and Process”. The piece shows that, from the perspective of early 2005, I thought I could discern a change of focus in my writing that originated from the Summer of 2003. It also refers to a conference on “Critical Psychology” (at which I was introduced to Ken and Mary Gergen) that focused on social construction. Here is what I wrote and what my supervisor offered by way of comment.

In the first part of my doctoral journey I had spent a lot of time re – exploring my own history and re evaluating my own experience in the light of the doctoral journey including my engagement with my supervision group. The direction of my gaze had on the whole been inwards and backwards, touching on many aspects of my working and my personal life: relations with my wife, childhood memories, embedded beliefs about how my most intimate relations had formed me. In the Summer of 2003 I had come to see the limits of this way of proceeding as my writing teetered on the edge of self-indulgence, and a rather myopic sentimentality (highlighted in my [failed] transfer meeting in July 2003). An important spur to my dissatisfaction with this way of proceeding had arisen from a flirtation (*Judi*: “mmm. Feels a bit dismissive.”) with social constructionist texts which de centred individual origins as the main plot in the story of the self in favour of more external socially constructed origins. This had come to some kind of a head in August 2003 when I attended the “International Conference in Critical Psychology” at Bath University [[www.bath.ac.uk/psychology/critical](http://www.bath.ac.uk/psychology/critical)]. I could appreciate the radical return to the world implied by social construction for psychology but found it more difficult to locate it creatively in the story of my own development. I felt challenged by social construction but not much succoured (*Judi*: *maybe interesting data?*): I was finding it hard to relate it to my own history and developing interests. (*Judi*: “will there be a place in the thesis for what you did take from this?”) I did make a rather half hearted effort to bring to my Gestalt colleagues on Cape Cod a social constructionist critique of what we were doing but half a heart was not proving sufficient

to sustain and nourish my interest (*Judi*: “*nicely put*”) (*Body and Process*, Jan 2005, 25).

Judi’s questions about my attitude towards the Critical Psychology conference can only be addressed properly by taking account of the fact that there were two conferences to attend in July/August of 2003. My eventual response to the psychology conference was shaped by my experience two weeks later when I attended a “Roots of Gestalt” conference in Paris. At this conference I had my first encounter with Merleau-Ponty, and was introduced to the way in which he had drawn upon Gestalt psychology as an inspiration for his philosophical reflections. It is the second of these events that is destined to be more explicitly significant for my doctoral journey, because it is Gestalt and Merleau-Ponty’s particular reading of phenomenology that preoccupy the period through to the end of 2005, rather than social construction. Why is this?

When I first wrote about my interest in Merleau-Ponty I tried to capture the sense of familiar strangeness with which I experienced his ideas through a metaphor. I said in *Body and Process* that the ideas spoke to me “not like unknown territory but like a territory passed through at some distant time and now incompletely remembered. I feel disturbed by memory even as I venture forward into what is new, as if the new path was in reality a path back to what will in time be understood as familiar” (*Body and Process*, 12). That was the feeling of strange new familiarity that drew me on. This was due partly to the substance of Merleau-Ponty’s ideas as I engaged with them directly and also what I was learning about his biography. At one level his whole philosophy seemed to be a meditation on the primary idea from Gestalt psychology that something comes to be present against or from a ground that recedes as the “figure” appears. This idea seemed to be worked and deepened in ways that were a surprise and also a reminder. How does the emerging part relate to the ground? How does the figure turn back to illuminate the ground which then turns back to shape the figure differently? I found myself being challenged and heartened. I learned from “The Structure of Behaviour” to see my lived body as a configuring process; I lean on the table and the contact of hands to table becomes figural while the rest of my body flows behind the hand /table contact; what does it mean to see bodily behaviour as an emerging figure? What I perceive is always already tied to a context Merleau-Ponty says to me – it is a figure emerging from a ground: how, I wonder, does the ground continue to influence the figure? If the ground is invisible how can it be perceived without destroying it as ground by making it figural? These were the kind of generic questions that were being inspired by my encounter as I wrote and re wrote of my interest in the philosopher: the questions seemed to take me forward even as they took me back to the root idea of a gestalt. But it was not just that I was noticing connections at the level of abstract ideas for I also felt a more personal connection with Merleau-Ponty’s journey. How was I being more personally affected?

I was heartened by a feeling that Merleau-Ponty and I were following parallel paths in the sense that he was drawing inspiration for his own work from Gestalt, and I had been sustained by my own encounter with Gestalt: it seemed to me that we were both *nourished* by Gestalt. We had both drunk from the same pool and this connected me to the dead philosopher, and through him back to the founders of Gestalt. Through this imagined parallelism I became interested not only in how he was elaborating Gestalt ideas, but also in how he had connected to the people in the Gestalt world: had he had a similar experience to me? I quickly learned that we had been influenced by different stages in the development of Gestalt ideas: while I had made contact with Gestalt at a point when it was being transformed into a therapeutic method in 1950s and 60s USA, Merleau-Ponty's engagement had been with Gestalt as a psychology at its intellectual peak in pre World War Two Germany. In 1935 Merleau-Ponty returned to Paris from a teaching post in Beauvais to take up a position as a junior member of the Ecole Normale. At about this time he attended the lectures of Aron Gurwitsch (1966) on Gestalt psychology and three years later in 1938 he completed his first philosophical work "The Structure of Behaviour" (Merleau-Ponty, 1963). Pulled on by my understanding of Merleau-Ponty's journey I re visited the work of pre war psychologists such as Kohler (1947), Koffka (1935) and Katz (1951), guided by Gurwitsch's volume of articles on Gestalt psychology and phenomenology (1966). I also learned something of their history by reading Ash (1998) on the intellectual history of Gestalt psychology in pre war Germany. I was drawn to the tale of dispossession and exile; also by the psychologists struggle to establish themselves in a different context in the USA. I noticed, as I read on, a connection between their experience and that of Edmund Husserl who was also hounded from his University post by the Nazis. This provided another connection with Merleau-Ponty for the Gestalt psychologists were pupils of Husserl, and Merleau-Ponty had taken him as the starting point for his own philosophical investigations. I was touched by the stories and then moved to see Merleau-Ponty honouring and reviving these German psychologists and philosophers. Here was a Frenchman, who was captured and probably tortured by the Gestapo during the allied retreat of 1940, who was so full of German culture that his writing is littered with un-translated German words. He seemed to me to be honouring a broken, distant, civilisation – this touched my heart as well as my head.

It also made an impression on me as during the end of 2005 and into early 2006 I began to think about the method for my own thesis. I noticed more clearly that Merleau-Ponty used the work of the Gestalt psychologists as a starting point for his own reflections. He seemed to me to be respectfully absorbing their scientific conclusions and then finding fresh meaning in them even when this involved finding in their work things that they had not found themselves. This led to a "deliberately non adversarial dialectical strategy" (Carmen and Hansen, 2005: 4-5) in which he "often avoids staking out a thesis directly" or else he "only does so obliquely after extended preliminary discussion, exploration and imaginative unfolding of the problem at hand" (ibid). Instead he would be more likely to imagine himself

into the philosophical perspectives of the thinkers and the ideas he is critically examining, which will involve him in borrowing terminology and working with the flow of their ideas before asserting positions of his own<sup>45</sup>. This idea of really stepping into the position of the other thinker interests me as an example of trying to explore the grounded position of the other through a thorough engagement with their thought. Such an approach parallels one way in which I have approached Merleau-Ponty's thought: I have sought *to think with him* by deliberately adopting his positions and modes of seeing the world. In this way he has been a companion to my thinking in the second half of the doctoral journey.

An example of deliberately adopting a Merleau-Ponty type approach occurs in a piece I wrote in April 2005. It's a draft article for publication in the British Gestalt Journal in which I sought to describe through writing aspects of my experience using the conceptual space opened to me by Merleau-Ponty's ideas about the pre- personal engagement of the body with the world. I seem to be writing my way into (my understanding of) his embodied subjectivity. In this case the door handle becomes figural for the hand, which seems to be steered towards the handle by background knowledge stored in the body. The impression I create is of the inanimate object calling to the body.

As I return to the front door of the house my right arm ascends towards the door handle and my hand forms itself to grip the familiar handle. In smooth action I swing the door outwards and step through the opening; as I do so my right hand slips from the handle and grips the edge of the door pulling it back to close behind me with a gentle thump. Such is the intimacy of the contact between hand and handle that MP would say the handle calls to the hand to shape itself and guide itself into just the right form of connection. My expectation that I will navigate my way through the door is fulfilled through my contact, and my embodied skilfulness; there is no need for conscious awareness. ("Body, Field and Practice: Merleau-Ponty's Life World" P 5)

Now I start to think about other examples in the previous chapters of the thesis where I have sought to bring bodily feeling into my written descriptions of unfolding events; I am reminded of the way in which Merleau-Ponty's re thinking of the body (to follow) rhymed with my own experience of yoga as a practice of re connecting to my body and through it to the world. As I think these thoughts my body warms and my fingers slow into a more measured pushing at the keys – I realise the feeling as one of coming home to a right and familiar place. I'm /realising /and /expressing /something / that /I /feel/ I /have /long /known.

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<sup>45</sup> For example many of the Chapters in "Phenomenology of Perception" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) are based on examples of the work of Goldstein and the Gestalt theorist Gelb – particularly their work with the brain damaged German soldier Schneider.



Considering Merleau-Ponty's method of working from within someone else's conceptual frame, leads me to reflect on how I am trying out Merleau-Ponty's ideas within my own existence. This raises a question about the connection between thinking and experiencing. In Chapter Two I considered what Rilke had to say about the way in which writing may emerge from the rich ground of a life. Surely though writing may fold back to enrich that ground; that is all that is being proposed here is it not? Or I might say it in figure/ground terms as a particular way in which structuring of the ground with conceptual space might shape experience. In the case of the above extract the attempt to step into a Merleau-Ponty way of describing my experience is mannered, in the sense that it is deliberate, but it alerts me to the possibilities that, through adopting a thinkers form into my writing, I might begin to shift the basis of my own experience.

*My social network and Merleau-Ponty*

Returning to the question of why I was attracted to Merleau-Ponty rather than social construction I have outlined above an argument that my attraction was based on a pre existing connection. I felt a familiarity with the ideas of Merleau-Ponty through Gestalt and yoga that was partly explicit, in the sense of being understood at the time, and partly implicit in the sense of operating without being in determinate awareness. To the extent that this was true then my pre-existing connection to Gestalt ideas and to bodily practice operated (to some extent) *normatively from the ground*, shaping my preference through unaware inclination or disposition. Noticing such a point and expressing it in this way is another inheritance from Merleau-Ponty; he continually returns to the way in which our normative attitudes or dispositions operate interdependently with the existential worldly conditions in which those attitudes and dispositions are enmeshed. In this case I am setting out the ways in which Gestalt and yoga ready me for my encounter with Merleau-Ponty so that when it occurs it is accompanied by a felt connection that develops throughout the rest of the doctoral journey. I am excited without always knowing why. I lean into the experience of Merleau-Ponty as if it was meant to be so. I feel the contact as familiar but also as new. It is at once an affirmation of something already grasped and a radical extension. So far I have largely expressed this grounded connection in terms of ideas but it also had a counterpart in my social and cultural background. How was my interest in Merleau-Ponty being supported socially?

You may imagine that at the Gestalt conference there were many people I knew, some very well indeed, and that from a social point of view my interest in Merleau-Ponty felt like the extension and deepening of an existing network. In other words it was not just the ideal or conceptual content that was drawing me on but also my place in a world that I knew and felt a part of. For example, Malcolm Parlett, who had also been a teacher and a therapist to me in the past, had supervised one of the speakers (Kennedy, 2003) on Merleau-Ponty through his doctorate. He introduced me to the speaker who then sent me a copy of his thesis and a recommendation to read the introduction to the "Phenomenology of

Perception". The mixture of social and intellectual engagement is captured in this description I made of the Paris conference.

As I engrossed myself in the conference proceedings I found myself returning to M-P's work, by *seeking out others who already knew him and quizzing them*. My curiosity about him seemed to be focusing in on two sources: on the one hand I found that his use of concepts such as "figure/ground", "attention", and "form" (Gestalt) were strikingly familiar to me from my Gestalt training, while on the other I was intrigued to find that he seemed to be taking them further, using them in service of a wider theory of consciousness based on what seemed to be an extended use of the notion of "perception". He also seemed to be making a more general move away from psychology towards a view that consciousness in some way suffused the whole body. *I found there was sufficient pre existing connection between my own nascent ideas about the world, and M-P – through Gestalt and the emphasis on the body – to make me feel as though here was someone who might be a useful guide and stimulus for my own inquiry*, while also recognising that following him would take me into new and unfamiliar places. (Body and Process, January 2005, P24. Emphasis added.)

I had also spent the first half of 2003 trying to sustain energy during a review of my Gestalt connection and finding it all a bit flat – I was I suppose primed to find some direction for my work on Gestalt. I notice now the personal tone to my references to Merleau-Ponty ("following him", "my curiosity about him") as reinforcement to the point I am making about social engagement; not only with the people at the Conference but also with the dead man as a person not just a collection of ideas; I was interested in the way his ideas were grounded in the life of the man.

By contrast I did not, at the psychology conference, feel the same depth of pre existing connection. I felt more of a stranger and less connected through my history and my heart. I did not have the same sense of felt engagement as I discovered when I was introduced to Merleau-Ponty in the presence of long standing friends and colleagues at the Gestalt conference. I imagine now that if Ken and Mary Gergen were here, staring over my shoulder as I tap away, they would nod to each other at my account of my social entwining in the Paris conference as if to say "of course": they would not only understand, but they would take my account as evidence of the social construction of my doctoral journey. I notice now how I call them up, and am slightly surprised that I should want them to understand, and "nod" in approval. I only met them briefly so why should they make an appearance here<sup>46</sup>? This takes me back to my use of "explicit" when referring to my interest in the Gestalt Conference, and to the implication that something implicit was involved in my attendance at the Psychology conference. What was this?

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<sup>46</sup> I intend no disrespect. They have every right to be included as scholars in their own right. I mean to reinforce the connection between human contact and ideas.

I feel now that my attendance at the critical psychology conference represented something in my relationship with the supervision of my doctorate by Judi. She had raised the conference to my attention and had gently encouraged my attendance. At the conference she had taken pains to introduce me to Ken and Mary Gergen. I felt all this, and I feel it now, as a firm encouragement to lift my head towards the wider world and to the ideas that had helped psychology away from individualism towards a more socially connected perspective on our existence. The fact that I didn't dive straight into social construction, but found my own way towards a realisation of my embedded-ness in the world is a tribute to the way in which the supervision was being offered. In the context of the pending discussion around figure and ground I would say that the supervision was very respectful of the context in which I am working the doctorate. (On reflection this is one of the more subtle things being afforded me by the doctoral process; not an inconsequential thing for a process consultant either). Judi was throughout the doctoral journey carefully seeking the right balance between guidance and not forcing her view onto me.<sup>47</sup> In the context of figure ground it seems that Judi was acknowledging that the figure of my doctoral thesis needed to arise from the ground of my life. If I see the psychology conference in this wider context then "flirtation" does grate with me now. I see how my language appears to be dismissive and wince at the implication that it is not only dismissive of the conference, but also of my supervisor's encouragement towards a more socially contextualised view of existence<sup>48</sup>. An important aspect of my journey turns out to be towards my situated-ness in history and culture, and in this respect I am following a path pioneered by the social constructionist critique of a longstanding tradition of a positivist/empiricist science. It's just that I had to

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<sup>47</sup> To illustrate here is Judi writing about her supervision of K through her transfer meeting:

"I tried to tell her how interesting, multi dimensional and related to her research topic I thought the meeting had been. She seemed to agree, but I was wary lest I seem to be forcing my view onto her, and so pulled back. I did not ask her if she thought I had helped her enough to prepare her transfer paper. That was too stark a question, within one potential sense making frame, which polarized authority about her work in ways I resisted." (Living Systemic Thinking P133)

The care with which Judi feels her way into contact in this exchange, partly through the grading of the question, has been a largely silent, but nevertheless significant influence on my doctoral journey. She shows a subtle sensitivity to the situation even as she moves to influence how the situation unfolds. This type of "tactical" interactivity is something that I have noticed and taken from the supervisory process. I hesitate to announce it as a "learning" for this seems to offend the implicit nature of how I have come to appreciate this quality of contact.

<sup>48</sup> When she saw an earlier draft of the thesis my supervisor said in relation to this sentence: "Which you were already showing by then. I was taking my clues from you."

find my own way: one that was supported by a conceptual frame that emerged out of the conjunction of Gestalt and phenomenology.

*My personal connection to Merleau-Ponty*

The theme of the interaction between ideas and my life continues as I take on Merleau-Ponty as if he was a living person – a friend and guide. This is relevant to the thesis because he is a considerable presence to me throughout the second half of the doctoral journey. I feel my connection increasingly to be with the man and not just with his books and ideas. I can illustrate the effect of this by providing an example that occurred towards the end of the journey in January/February 2007 when I broke off from writing this thesis to write a separate paper which was a final attempt to synthesise the effect that Merleau-Ponty's thought was having on me. I introduce parts of what I wrote then to illustrate the way in which I was conceiving of my relationship with him.

The context for this example is a rather surprising interlude in preparing this thesis. By the beginning of this year (2007) I had submitted a first draft of this thesis, and had a meeting (mid November 2006) with my supervisor, after which I had gone away to further develop the draft. As I reflected back on the draft I found myself thinking back on my engagement with Merleau-Ponty and I engaged in a rather extraordinary diversion: during late January and February of this year (2007) I put my draft to one side and wrote another 18,000 words that made no reference at all to the draft! It was as if I needed to finish something not properly completed in the draft. Eventually, following a long conversation with my supervisor on March 6<sup>th</sup> 2007, I returned to finalising my original draft. The piece I wrote during January and February is so detached from the thesis I had written that I propose to deal with it as if it was another (final) piece of documentation for the thesis. I said in the first sentence to this paragraph that this extra writing related directly to my "felt connection" with Merleau-Ponty; in what way was this so?

The content of the writing is mainly concerned with deepening and synthesising my understanding of Merleau-Ponty's thought. I describe it in the piece as being somewhere between what we might normally understand as history of his thought, and a kind of interpretive appropriation, in which we see *the history of my understanding*. With hindsight I can see that I needed to think through the position of Merleau-Ponty's thought, and phenomenology more generally, in my doctoral journey. The implicit question from this interlude seems to be, how was my engagement with his thought (and the people involved with it) exciting and moving me? It was in the midst of writing about this that on February the 21<sup>st</sup> I had a kind of half dream. I described it like this<sup>49</sup>:

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<sup>49</sup> The text I produced in January, February 2007 was so separated from the preparation of the thesis that I'm going to treat it like a separate document as if it was one of the other documents I have used as information and evidence in writing this thesis. I have called the piece "Myself and Merleau-Ponty".

[In the days before the 21<sup>st</sup> February, 2007] I kept returning to the way I had been so moved in the last year. From this returning I conceived one morning of the idea of drawing [Merleau-Ponty's] intellectual realm as a kind of chart of a journey. I imagined that I had discovered a roughly sketched map with some scribbled notes attached in the pages of an ancient journal. I imagined a wise and courageous originator whose steps I was now bound to follow. The scenario unfolded like a Boys Own tale. In this slightly regressive emotional state I drew the journey I imagined the original explorer had taken together with some scribbled notes. .... I'm aware at one level of feelings of presumption. (I'm embarrassed by my cheek.) I presume a connection of something like apprenticeship! (Myself and Merleau-Ponty, 13)

I added in a footnote related to this piece that discloses my uncertainty about reporting what was happening. I think it also discloses more sensual feeling aspects of why I was writing:

I hope this will not prove too fanciful an introduction. The thought of this metaphoric description came to me in one of those early morning reveries when only half awake. Frequently what arises in such moments is best left to private memory, but on this occasion the images of journeying, and following with their mixed up emotional overtones of assurance (coming home) and dispossession (discovering a strange land) proved too persistent to ignore. The notion of following someone who had journeyed into difficult territory and who had left behind notes for the follower spoke to me at an emotional level as representing part of my experience as I sought to describe my contact with Merleau-Ponty. I imagined myself exploring territory already traversed – picking up tracks and trying to interpret the scribbled notes in an old journal. On the morning of this oneiric reverie the metaphor was reinforced as I took my dog Feste for a walk to discover that the Thames was overflowing our normal path, and we had to strike out into the muddy hinterland of Iffley Fields. I'm afraid to say that as I splashed along with Feste I sought out the features of my imaginary map in the reality of the countryside around me (Myself and Merleau-Ponty, 13).

It strikes me that in resorting to a drawing in my notebook I was seeking in some way to stay closer to the point at which these thoughts and feelings emerged. The image came first as a kind of sensual encounter that I then sought to understand through words. As I started to explicate, scribbling in my notebook with duvet drawn around me (ignoring the sleepy protests from my wife!), the words that came sent me back to my drawing to refine and amend it. The scenario of being a traveller in my own right, yet also being a follower, evoked a complex web of thought and feeling. It was like recognition, appropriation, and dependence all at the same time. It's not so easy to break up the feeling into neat categories. In the first extract above I speak of "apprenticeship". Perhaps there *is* a sense in which an aspect of this doctoral journey has been an apprenticeship to phenomenology, and to this particular man, who stood for a particular way of taking on phenomenology. However, my connection to the man and his thought has also been supported by the way in which it originated in the warmth of

contact with real people at the Roots of Gestalt conference. As Gestalt is another important part of the intellectual framework for this thesis I would like to say more about how my Gestalt connection has been reinforced by friendship and personal connection.

## 4.2. Gestalt and friendship

In this section I explain how my engagement with Gestalt ideas took place within a social context to reinforce the theme of ideas as part of my lived existence. This leads me into explaining which ideas from Gestalt I have taken on as important, especially the way in which the fundamental notion of figure/ground has underpinned the intellectual structure of the thesis, and also provided a significant point of contact with the thought of Merleau-Ponty. I explain how this contact has invigorated my existing connection to Gestalt and brought new things into my life.

From the summer of 2003 through to the summer of 2004 I was re-working, refining and re-submitting to supervision a single piece of material that is a mixture of Gestalt theory and personal story. One of the main themes of this writing is the strong personal impact Gestalt has on me, partly as a result of the ideas, but, perhaps more importantly, because of the people I met. The practitioners, who became my teachers, had a quality of being alertly in the world that appealed to me, and seemed to offer me something I needed, and wanted. (I went to therapy for the first time during this period - with a Gestalt therapist). I was emerging from a difficult job in the aggressive environment of a large car manufacturing plant. My job had required me to place myself in the heart of the industrial relations conflict between a domineering management and an aggressive Trade Union movement, causing me to learn how to survive personally in this “piggy in the middle” role. Under pressure I developed a style of deflecting<sup>50</sup> tension and conflict so that it would wash around me and not engulf me. (I think I can see traces of this approach in the way that I handled my feelings of discomfort in my supervision group). Of course the deflection was only partly successful and I did become stressed by the situation. As a result my subsequent engagement with Gestalt was laced with personal healing and therapeutic support. The need for personal support as I recovered from my experience drew me to the people as much as to the ideas. I found that they supported me whilst also challenging me to move back into fuller contact with them and through them with friends and family. My engagement was further deepened and also complicated when, towards the end of this period in my life, in 1996, I left my Corporate existence to become an organisation consultant, drawing upon the ideas and the personal support of two Gestalt teachers, Edwin Nevis and Malcolm Parlett, as I made this transition. This is the account I now hold of this meeting with Gestalt: how did this particular rendition help me as I re-engaged with Gestalt on the doctoral journey during 2003?

This personal involvement tended to cloud the distinction between ideas and personal experience. When I re visited my Gestalt beliefs I found that understandings taken at face value from teachers were likely to be presented

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<sup>50</sup> “Deflection” is a term used in Gestalt therapy to indicate an inclination to avoid contact such as when a person turns away a compliment with a self depreciating joke.

differently in the literature, or seemed to be more contested in the Gestalt community than I had allowed for. This was how I described this when writing in January 2004. I discovered that:

....what had started out as a descriptive effort has turned out to be also a journey of discovery. I have found myself returning to the original texts of Perls and others in order to substantiate something I wanted to say only to discover that I appeared to be labouring under a misunderstanding, or to discover some new meaning that was of more interest to me. So over the three months I have been focussing on trying to write 'a piece' about Gestalt I have been revising my understanding of Gestalt as I have gone along. (Gestalt and Organisation consulting version 1, 2003: 2)

My understanding of Gestalt ideas was being flexed as it was brought into juxtaposition with what I was taking from phenomenology. The result was a slow weaving together of aspects of Gestalt and phenomenology to produce a new conceptual framework for myself. In my transfer papers from January '05 I pulled together an account of this period in which I made a summary description of what I had initially taken from Gestalt as an "antidote" to the "closing down" I had experienced in the motor industry. I went on to describe the benefit as a "re-expanding of my awareness of my self and the world, and attending to the quality of my contact with that world". I continued on citing an article by Malcolm Parlett called "On Being Present at One's Own Life" (Parlett, 43) as seeming to "sum up what my contact with the Gestalt world of people and ideas was giving me." This seems to me to capture the essence of my initial engagement: the period was marked by influential teachers, who showed as much as told me about Gestalt; and the succour I drew was to metaphorically lift my head and take in the world in a deeper and fuller way through the Gestalt *practice of awareness*. What did I understand by this concept at the time?

Awareness is a classic place to start with teaching Gestalt therapy in the form it was being offered to me. In a personal communication Sonia Nevis has told me that the therapeutic method largely attributed to Fritz Perls was nearly called "Concentration Therapy". It was located by my teachers, especially by those who taught me on a Gestalt and systems dynamics programme I attended from 1991 to 1993, within a psychology of needs fulfilment, itself in service of my healthy functioning in the environment. This was expressed in terms of a course of action designed to enable me to "discover [my] self and to mobilize it for greater effectiveness in satisfying [my] requirements both as a biological organism and as a social human being" (Perls, Hefferline and Goodman, 3). Let one of my teacher's from this period pick up the story from here. As he was my teacher this will be a fair representation of what I was being taught, and, as he is also a leader in the field of Gestalt, he will also speak more generally; he will provide a bridge between the personal and the broader Gestalt world. Edwin Nevis places awareness in the context of the fundamental notion of a Gestalt figure appearing from a ground that becomes progressively less distinct as the figure brightens and clarifies:



To form a figure is to become interested in or concerned about something and to strive to give meaning to the experience. Being in touch with a figure as it forms is what we call “awareness”. This is our way of taking in what our senses tell us and of knowing what is happening at any moment. This is the beginning phase of the Cycle of Experience (Nevis, 6)

Edwin then goes on to describe a process where the person moves through a stage of increasing energy and mobilisation to act to satisfy the perceived need through some form of contact, before subsiding into a satisfied state (from where fresh awareness might arise).

What I took from this at the time was a focus on the progressive emergence of the figure and by analogy on the progressive emergence of myself. As I re read the actual work of Nevis I appreciate that this was more to do with what I was taking than with what was being offered. For example the model of the cycle of experience situates the person as always already connected to their environment, or their situation; the cycle is describing a relationship between the emerging clarity of the perceived thing, and the needs of the perceiver. In my early encounter though I was to become interested in the emergence of the figure, and correspondingly, as I have said, in the emergence of myself. In taking this perspective I was not alone because, as Gordon Wheeler was to convincingly argue, Gestalt Therapy did become “figure bound” (Wheeler, 1991). The core Gestalt therapy texts, particularly the book *Gestalt Therapy* from 1951 by Perls, Hefferline and Goodman focused on the brightening and strengthening of the figure. For example, the authors, having introduced the idea of “the forming of a figure of interest against a ground or context”, go on to say as follows:

*The figure (gestalt) in awareness is a clear, vivid perception, image, or insight; in motor behaviour it is the graceful energetic movement that has rhythm, follows through, etc. In either case the need and energy of the organism and the likely possibilities of the environment are unified in the figure.* (Perls, Hefferline and Goodman, 1951: 231. Emphasis added.)

The authors go on to say that the “urgencies and resources of the field” continue to “lend their powers” (ibid) to the coming into being of the figure.

While the contextuality of the figure is formally recognised, a strong or bright figure is honoured as an ideal, and, by this account the *figure is able to break free from its dependence on the ground.*

The figure is specifically psychological: it has specific observable properties of brightness, clarity, unity, fascination, grace, vigour, release, etc.....The fact that the gestalt [that is the figure] has specific observable psychological properties is of capital importance in psychotherapy, for it gives *an autonomous criterion of the depth and reality* of the experience. It is not necessary to have theories of “normal” behaviour or “adjustment to reality” except in order to explore.” (Perls Hefferline and Goodman, 1951: 231-232. Emphasis in the original)

This amounts to a conflation of figure to gestalt (that is the ground is forgotten), which inflects into an individualistic approach towards the therapeutic process. It marks for me a separation of self from other, and the idealisation of self as an independent identity. This was reflected for me in the way I was first taught about how the smooth flow towards the fulfilment of needs could be interrupted by what were known as “resistances”. For example deflection is a “resistance” clouding the ideal of my unclouded awareness. In the beginning I was taught (I took up from the teaching) what I now consider to be a naive attitude that awareness might be purged of all resistance so that it could serve a clear and “real” encounter with the world.

As I revisited my understanding of my Gestalt roots during late 2003 I came to see how I had taken in this naive view. Largely as a result of my engagement with phenomenology, I began to recover the “ground” more fully into my notion of Gestalt form. In the course of this I re-engaged with developments in Gestalt thought that had made a similar move towards re-contextualising the figure in the figure/ground concept (Wheeler, 1991; Parlett,). As 2003 progressed into 2004 I was engaged in a fruitful dialogue between Gestalt ideas and phenomenology that was focused particularly around the inter relatedness of figure and ground (or thing in its situation in phenomenology). With hindsight I can see that the energy from this dialogue was in part due to the reversing figure ground dynamic of my conversation with Gestalt and phenomenology: I would make Gestalt figural against a phenomenological ground, and then switch the figure ground relationship to use aspects of my Gestalt knowledge to help my understanding of phenomenology. In this way I was enriching my understanding of both. In this kind of way phenomenology and Gestalt were feeding off each other and arousing my interest in both.

Gradually as 2003 moved into 2004 my doctoral interest was locating itself more firmly around the ground: how could we inquire into the ground? How could the idea of “ground” help me to understand my own life experience?

#### *My commitment to the ‘ground’*

In these paragraphs I demonstrate my commitment to “ground” and to the way in which I was re-working my understanding of this concept as I discussed it within the CARPP supervisory process and subjected it to the new perspective being provided by Merleau-Ponty’s thought.

Towards the end of 2005 I began to draft an article for the “Gestalt Journal” about a consulting assignment. In it I summarised my understanding of figure/ground. I include it here as evidence of how I was fleshing out the concept partly aided by re visiting some of the primary Gestalt psychology texts produced before the advent of Gestalt Therapy; also because the comments from my supervisor and fellow student lead me to question my own presentation in one particular aspect, which re-opens me to a phenomenological reading of figure/ground. Here is my extract from the article due to be published later in 2007. I have edited out the cross-references to the consulting assignment, because I am mainly interested at

this point in the presentation of the concept. I will return to the consulting assignment in a moment.

Gestalt psychology proposed that the basic units of experience were organised wholes, which had the form of a figure against a ground. These units of figure and ground were the irreducible matter of experience. As they were already configured or organised they were already meaningful. In making this proposition, based on their own experimental findings, they were placing organisation at the heart of their conceptual method.... a gestalt is an organisation of parts.

*(C: This gives the impression of a rather static "figure/ground" rather than hinting at the flux between the two. I think of lava lamps here for some reason, constantly framing and re-framing".)*

Taking the core concept of the gestalt as an organised form or whole the Gestalt psychologists proposed two interdependent rules of organisation: a) the principle of unity or inner coherence, and b) the principle of contextual relevancy. It is, they asserted, the interdependent operation of these two principles which gives rise to the meaning of any form of organised experience.

*(Judi: Writing I can skim more – factual tone. O.K. not a criticism. Will you come onto gestalting?)*

Both the reference to the liquid lava lamp and the question about "gestalting" highlight this "rather static" presentation. This is reinforced by the use of past tense, which helps to give the whole presentation a rather abstract feel – the "factual tone" that Judi refers to. This abstraction continues, and leaves me now with a rather unsatisfactory impression that the I am presenting the gestalt form as not only static, but also objective; as if it existed separately from the person who was "gestalting".

Nothing could be further from the intent of the gestalt psychologists. Lyotard (1991) makes the point succinctly in *Phenomenology* when he says of a gestalt: "it is not in itself – that is, it does not exist independently of the subject" nor is it "constructed by the subject in a simplistic sense" (Lyotard, 1991: 81). The point was important for the Gestalt psychologists such as Koffka, and also for Merleau-Ponty when figure ground became a conceptual space within which to examine human behaviour. If an aspect of behaviour such as my colleague crying becomes figural to herself or to me this is not an objective fact that can be understood without more, nor is it just a subjective construction open to any interpretation I wish to make. Her crying is contextualised for her *and for me*. As the observer my ground influences my observation of her in ways that are partly open and partly closed to me. It is the same for my colleague – the figure of her experience of crying is informed by her "ground", which is only partly transparent to her. Koffka critiqued Watson<sup>51</sup> for assuming behaviour to be objective.

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<sup>51</sup> Lyotard, *Phenomenology*, 82

Merleau-Ponty defined human behaviour as being ambiguous: neither objective fact or subjective constitution (behaviour only means what the subject constructs it to mean). I continued.

The principle of unity or inner coherence is what Koffka called the “Law of Good Gestalt” (Koffka, 110)). This is a phenomenal concept whereby a state of organisation tends to be the best that it can be where “best” indicates a state of maximum stability (*Judi: dangerous in our times. C: Ah ha! That’s interesting from a business, organisational viewpoint, but I really don’t believe it*), clarity and good arrangement. David Katz reinforces and adds to this when he says “It should be emphasised that ‘good’ refers to such characteristics as regularity, symmetry, inclusiveness, harmony, maximal simplicity and conciseness” (Katz, D. p40). Wertheimer adds a more clearly normative aspect to the idea of a “Good Gestalt” when he describes a “Law of Pragnanz” as indicating the way in which certain impressive configurations tend towards completion; they unfold towards their best possible state. The focus here is on internal coherence and what we might call “rightness” as judged by a range of perceptual facilities including some aesthetic ones.....the way a situation feels for example.

My presentation of the figure as if it *achieves* its state of maximal clarity arouses a response in C and Judi. I go on to damp down the suggestion that the figure might complete itself (and thus transcend the ground) later as I speak of things emerging “*towards completion*”.

The aspect of the figure *emerging but never completing its emergence* is destined to become important for me in my reading of phenomenology. It also becomes a point at which I begin to grasp the connection between Gestalt and Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology around emergence, as I will show in a moment. There is a paragraph deleted here relating the above to something earlier in the article, and then I continue.

The principle of contextuality derives from the figure ground nature of experience. What is figural acquires meaning from a relationship that the figure has with its ground. The figure may retain its integrity or coherence, but acquires different meaning because the context shifts. The Gestalt psychologists for example discovered that a dark colour would invariably appear brighter against a lighter background without any change in the luminosity of the figure, and visa versa for lighter colours. Unambiguous determinate meaning for any figure can only be achieved by de-contextualising it or by privileging one context over all others. [I have deleted four sentences relating this to something earlier in the article]. It is the principle of contextuality that lends an essentially ambiguous aspect to experience of the world.

Gestalt thus proposes a double movement of organisation: an inward movement whereby any emerging phenomenon seeks to complete itself in unity and an accompanying outwards movement which emphasises the situatedness of any theme or emerging form, and tends to de stabilise any fixing of form or meaning (Farrands, 2007).

It is not clear here in this abstracted quotation what exactly I mean by “inward” and “outward” movement; I mean “inward” to refer to the figure emerging from the ground, and by “outward” to the ground continuing to frame or contain the development of the figure. It is this notion of a kind of compromised freedom that Merleau-Ponty picks up from the notion of a Gestalt. It is also at this point that I become interested in the intersection of Gestalt and phenomenology; it is this point of intersection that is now of interest to me in this thesis for it opens up new conceptual space for me to make sense of my experience on the doctoral journey and invigorates the final year of my doctoral journey. What is this point of intersection? What do I mean by “conceptual space?”

Let me respond to both these questions by quoting a short piece in which Merleau-Ponty shows his own reading of figure and ground. I can then use this as a text from which to describe how my own understanding was being influenced, and is still being influenced.

Everything that is produced is never anything but a ‘*Gestalt*’ (a form, which is related to something else, hence, not ‘free’<sup>52</sup>; which has not yet overcome itself; and which does not quite know itself fully yet).”

I take “form” here to be synonymous with “figure” as I have been using it so far. The reference to “not yet overcome itself” I take as a reference to the incompleteness of the form in its perpetually situated state. The form has not “overcome” its own situation, or to put it differently fails to realise its urge towards transcendence. It is, on this account bound, and “not free”. However, I also notice the “not yet” and the “know itself fully yet.” What do these conditional words mean here? If Merleau-Ponty wanted to assert the strength of context – to emphasise its hold over the figure then it would be clearer not to include these words. I take them not to mean that the figure will never arise from the hold of the ground, but that it is in the process of moving in this direction; emerging but never fully emerged. I gain support for this view as I read on and find him responding to the question, “why is the form related to something else?” and responding with, “Because it is engulfed, non transparent to itself, but, according to its very nature, it is *in the process of ‘appearing’*.” Here we have the dual movement at the heart of his reading of phenomenology and arguably also at the heart of the figure ground gestalt: on the one hand the dynamic of engulfment, which, above, I referred to as “contextuality”; on the other the process of appearing or in the Gestalt sense configuring. In the language of freedom that Merleau-Ponty adopts in the centre of the above quotation we can say that a figure is always seeking with out ever fully realising freedom from its ground.

This sense of an essential dynamic that is never fully realised is an important element in Merleau-Ponty’s thought. It establishes an essential

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<sup>52</sup> These scare marks indicate where Merleau-Ponty left a word in German, not bothering to translate it into French. The editor of the notes subsequently translated the word and left the scare marks to show where he had done so.

ambiguity in phenomenon and experience, which is a characteristic signature of his thought. In life things – ideas, people, values etc – don't quite break free into absolute self-determination. It takes considerable effort or blind dogmatism to freeze the ground long enough (in a laboratory for example), to stabilise the figure for long enough to claim that it might be free of the disruptive power of changing context. As this is an aspect of this thought that I have come to take up and to try on as I have engaged with a renewed curiosity in figure / ground let me explain how I have come to understand Merleau-Ponty in this regard. This will enable me to stand back to examine how Merleau-Ponty's conceptualisation has enabled me to re think my practice and to develop a different way of thinking about my place in the world.

### 4.3. 'Ground' as world

In this section I show how I re-commit to a revised formulation of the 'ground' in the Gestalt figure/ground configuration as I deepen my connection with Merleau-Ponty's thought. The interaction between his thought and my pre-existing understanding of Gestalt, produces a fruitful interaction, which leads me to connect 'ground' with Merleau-Ponty's existential notion of being in the world. This connection produces an energetic exchange which has the effect of directing my doctoral interests towards my own groundedness, and I begin to ask how am I grounded in the world? This deepening interest in being situated shapes the remainder of the thesis.

The way in which Merleau-Ponty took up and used the idea of figure ground has provided me with an ideological underpinning for an existential journey. This journey is the one I have sought to track and share within CARPP through my doctoral writing. My writing has given me a way to recover the journey and to seek to make sense of it for myself. In the last half of the journey, from the Summer of 2003 onwards Merleau-Ponty has been a constant companion to my sense making efforts. This time has included the revelation of my daughter's illness in the Autumn of 2005, a discovery which has disturbed my progress whilst also deepening my experience. It has been a terrible gift. My reliance on the ideas of the French philosopher and phenomenologist has been rendered all the more poignant because of his connection to Gestalt, because this is a connection which has been a source of nourishment to me in the second half of my life. Merleau-Ponty has refreshed the stream from which I have been drinking. How has this excited my interest and influenced my practice? I said that Merleau-Ponty had "used" the idea of figure and ground: what did I mean?

One way I mean this is that Merleau-Ponty followed and then exceeded Heidegger in leading phenomenology back into the world. He discovered close at hand through our body a primordial connection between our selves and our situation, including other people and a world that we shared. In this sense he re-connected the figure of separate selves with the ground of our existence on this earth under this sky. As I track the development of this re-entry into the world I am led to think of a primary dialectical relationship between thought and existence, and also of the idea that expression through writing might be the thinking process that expresses one part of this dialectic. In my mind this dialectic has a figure ground aspect where my expressed thought is the thematised figure emerging from the ground of my unthematized, and therefore silent, life. What warrant for this thought do I find in Merleau-Ponty?

To respond to this question I want to show how Merleau-Ponty departed radically from his inspiration Edmund Husserl. Merleau-Ponty took from Husserl in particular a concern to provide as rich and full a description of things as possible before entering into speculation about those things – whether they be objects, living creatures or abstractions. However he

departed radically from Husserl in his definition of how to do this. Both thinkers recognise that we only ever have a partial grasp of things - they appear as things for us and these are referred to as “phenomena”. Husserl considered phenomena as abstractions which could be analysed, while for Merleau-Ponty they were something living within a context – a figure against a ground. Metaphorically, we might say that Husserl was to lay the phenomena out as an idea on the bench of his mind and to dissect them, while Merleau-Ponty was to try to observe them wild in their habitat. What do I mean by this?

To understand the difference between the two philosophers we first have to look behind the difference, and grasp their shared commitment to the principle of intentionality. This principle holds that all consciousness is “consciousness of” or an ‘experience of’ something or other” (Sokolowski, 2000: 8). For the phenomenologist we only have ‘consciousness’ because there are things to be ‘conscious of’. If we use the idea of energy as a metaphor here, then I picture the phenomenologist as turning attention to the energetic movement of things towards us as opposed to paying attention to ‘constituting’ energy moving from the person out to shape the world. Hence the, sometimes strange sounding, ways in which things are said to ‘appear for’ or ‘to’ us. Things in the world are given dignity and presence of their own; and also *foundational sense* for us – the things of the world *found* our consciousness. Husserl<sup>53</sup> developed a method for realising this insight, which became a source of difference with Merleau-Ponty (and others such as Heidegger); however Merleau-Ponty never lost his commitment to the things themselves, or to the significance of the world for human being. In fact he was to arguably take this commitment further than any of his fellow phenomenologists, through his insight into the way the body was correlated to its situation in the world.

The source of the methodological difference between the two philosophers was that Husserl was to focus attention onto things *as immanent states*, and to focus away from direct contact with things in the world, whereas Merleau-Ponty was to join Heidegger in engaging fully with phenomenon in the world. Husserl’s method was to reduce the phenomena to mental content, and then to analyse the essential content of the thing – the intentional content. The two steps were known as reductions: first the transcendental reduction which removed the thing from its natural habitat to make it a thing for us – a phenomenon of our mind. This is based on the assumption that we cannot know the thing directly – that we always

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<sup>53</sup> I rely here, and throughout the thesis, primarily on my reading of Husserl in the Cartesian Meditations (Husserl, 1960). Intellectually, the thesis may be said to hinge around my attempts to grasp the significance of this intentional way of seeing myself in the world. Eventually I come to grasp a fundamental participation between myself and the world, but, under the influence of these phenomenologists, not a participation that is symmetrical – I reach to understand that the things come first, and that I am only conscious because of these things of the world. I grasp it as an essentially poetic insight in which true understanding trails some way behind intellectual consent to the idea.



perceive a particular perspective on the thing in the world, based on our mental representation; it becomes a phenomenon for me. This leads to a second move, the eidetic reduction, which focuses on identifying the normative, ideal, and relatively fixed, element of any thing, and the way in which this ideal has become a structure for the mind. What is the normative content of our mind that exists as fundamental ideas to shape the content of what we bring to consciousness as phenomena? This was the question addressed by Husserl, motivated by the insight that any rational science would have to start by exposing these taken for granted “intentions” as the basis of all subsequent thinking about what was real. The method produces a transcendent [because the mind exceeds the world] idealism [everything is reduced to an idea].

I return to the e-mail that I sent to Judi just after my experience in the supervision group, to read in particular the first move I made towards an explanation for my behaviour. It is interesting for me to remember here that the whole incident had been precipitated by my deliberate attempt to withdraw from my situation – to sit outside my group’s consideration of myself and my writing. I had offered a story to explain my subsequent behaviour that related to how my parents had sent me away when I was a child. Are there similarities here in the way I think the reasons for my behaviour and Husserl’s constructs? I bring forward an *idea of my parents and of my childhood* to account for my behaviour. Does this not then provide a frame through which I see, at first, the whole incident? Do I not turn back to the ideal content of my own consciousness, to an account that has become a conceptualisation? My behaviour has a cause in me – my taking up of the figure of my mother, and the sense I make of a particular period of my life. The humanistic move to not blame my mother – to understand her situation, and to accept responsibility for my interpretation, while worthy in itself, only makes the self centred turn more pronounced: I become prime cause. Is this kind of centripetal turn with its narcissistic overtones a consequence of turning from the world in the way that Husserl demonstrates? The change of stance towards the event that gradually works in me throughout 2003 is to see the events as much more a question of a kind of engaged coping with the situation and the relationships within my group. Others, real live others, rather than frozen memories or conceptualisations of others, become more significant in understanding what happened. I struggle with making sense of feelings as a descriptive effort rather than directly seeking causes. As an accompaniment to this turn I also find that issues of identity become less central to the account. Issues of whether I am blaming my mother or taking responsibility for my own interpretation simply become of less significance in the sense making process. Is this the style of movement that is needed to step away from my own centripetal swing? Is it also the style of move that steps away from the picture that has held us prisoner? Is this shift of stance paralleling in some way my growing understanding of Merleau-Ponty?

Merleau-Ponty understood Husserl’s purpose in trying to separate our own intending from the world towards which it was directed. However he

brought the attempt to do this back into the real world rejecting the attempt to reduce all phenomena to an immanent state of mind in favour of an existential phenomenology. The purpose was still to see our intentional content so that we might have a fuller grasp of things themselves; however this was an effort to be made while things still subsisted in the world. He expresses his process in worldly terms as one of detaching ourselves from our intimate binding to our situation so that we can see the things as they are. The effort (never to be fully achieved<sup>54</sup>) is to understand the common sense, taken for granted attitudes that “provided the presupposed basis of any thought” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, xiii) which “go unnoticed” and which can only be brought to view when “we suspend for a moment our recognition of them”. He thought that the best formulation of the reduction was that offered by Eugen Fink, Husserl’s assistant when he spoke of “wonder in the face of the world”:

Reflection does not withdraw from the world towards the unity of consciousness as the world’s basis [*that is the kind of transcendental idealism proposed by Husserl*]; it steps back to watch the forms of transcendence [*that is our intentional content*] fly up like sparks from a fire; it slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice; it alone is consciousness of the world because it reveals the world as strange and paradoxical. (ibid)

Merleau-Ponty here discloses a fundamental aspect of his thought<sup>55</sup>. What is ontologically prior for him is a perceptual world to which the body is already geared before thought occurs. The intimacy of the body to its situation is such that body and situation are taken for granted and therefore not seen. It is a “perceptual” world because it is based on a participatory perceptual process, which flows from how the body gears itself to its situation. It does this through a form of contact which discloses the things of the world to the body at the same time as this contact feeds back to inform the body of its own presence. There is an echo of a position adopted in Gestalt Therapy in which it is said that “contact is the first reality”, leading to the creation of a field of presence in which world and self become manifest<sup>56</sup>. The mutuality is so intimate in this contact that Merleau-Ponty

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<sup>54</sup> “The most important lesson the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction” (PP xiv)

<sup>55</sup> What is fundamental for Merleau-Ponty is a relationship between a perceiving body and a phenomenon that by its nature is for it: “It is the relation perception-phenomenon that is primitive, and all others – the relation of consciousness to nature included – can be understood only if this is recognised” (Bannan, 48)

<sup>56</sup> “We speak of the organism contacting the environment but it is the contact that is the simple and first reality.....Now the purpose of all the practical experiments and theoretical discussions in this book is to analyze the function of contacting and to heighten awareness of reality.” (Perls, Hefferline and Goodman 227)

later refers to it as a form of dehiscence as when a seed-pod opens forth. The body opens reaching out into the world and simultaneously folding back onto itself. In this way I can only become “conscious of my body via the world.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 82). My senses of sight, sound, hearing, smell, touch come together in the objects to which they are directed so that I learn about the senses as I learn about the object.

Samuel Todes<sup>57</sup> describes this as a kind of need fulfilment but arranged differently from the conscious goal direction of the Cycle of Experience, which is a conceptual rather than a perceptual presentation. In perception the body feels a vague lack or displacement (it is not conceptualised or appreciated as an idea), which it moves to rectify; as my body makes or improves contact in a normative adjustment to the world it gains simultaneous knowledge of what that need was, and what satisfied the need – world and body are known together<sup>58</sup>. Merleau-Ponty would describe this kind of fulfilment as “motor intentionality”. These processes of close mutual revelation create a situation where “our existence is too tightly held in the world to be able to know itself as such at the moment of its involvement” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, xv), which is why he speaks of slackening the intentional threads<sup>59</sup>. We have to stand back and in so doing we move from a perceptual to a conceptual stance towards the world. In his words we require the “field of ideality” to become acquainted with (as a

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<sup>57</sup> As suggested earlier Samuel Todes has an indirect connection to Merleau-Ponty. “He stands in two connected intellectual movements brought to the United States in the 1940s by German refugees: Gestalt Psychology and Phenomenology. The connection between them was first pointed out in the 1920s by Aron Gurwitsch. Gurwitsch worked closely with Husserl in Freiburg until the Nazis came to power in 1933. He then spent seven years in Paris lecturing on the confluence of Gestalt Psychology and Transcendental Phenomenology, where his lectures were attended by Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty subsequently transposed Gurwitsch’s Husserlian phenomenology of perception into his own existential account of the role of the lived body in experience. Gurwitsch fled France in 1940, and by 1948 he was teaching at Brandeis University and living in Cambridge, Massachusetts. There in 1955, he met Todes, who had worked with Wolfgang Kohler as an undergraduate psychology major at Swarthmore. Gurwitsch and Todes had weekly discussions centred on their mutual interest in the Gestalt theory of perception and its relevance for phenomenology. (Hubert, L. Dreyfus in Todes, xii)

<sup>58</sup> Merleau-Ponty sees us becoming alive to the perceptual capabilities of our bodies as we become alive to the world. “In the gaze we have a natural instrument analogous to the blind man’s stick. The gaze gets more or less from things according to the way in which it questions them, ranges over or dwells on them. To learn to see colours is to acquire a certain style of seeing, a new use of one’s own body; .....our body is not an object for an “I think”, it is a grouping of lived through meanings which moves towards its equilibrium.

<sup>59</sup> “...in order to see the world and grasp it as paradoxical, we must break with our familiar acceptance of it and, also, from the fact that from this break we can learn nothing but the unmotivated upsurge of the world.” (PPxiv)

personal 'I') and to "prevail" over the "facticity" of our embodied intertwining with our situation. For Merleau-Ponty this conceptual world is a secondary revelation that occurs as we "slacken" our perceptual entwining with the world to "reveal" the world

What are the consequences for me of engaging with this way of re-thinking my connection to the world? How does this intellectual reflection affect the themes of the thesis? To respond to this question I would like to reflect first on how I start to account for myself differently as I come to my own understanding of what I am taking from phenomenology.

*I start to synthesis a new world-view for myself*

The following paragraphs show how my intellectual engagement with the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty was supporting me in thinking again about my life as well as my commitment to Gestalt ideas. Especially how I conceptualised my self in the world of others. This section provides evidence that the dialogue between Gestalt and phenomenology, especially around the parallel (to me) ideas of being grounded and being in the world are beginning to re-shape how I see myself in relation to others. In this section I describe how I start to try and explain my shifting sense of myself to others.

I have already sought to suggest a parallelism in my own methodological shifts and what I am learning about this difference between Husserl and Merleau-Ponty; I start to account for myself differently to myself and to others also, by paying more attention to my situation. A part of this is an inclination to see my own identity as less figural; or rather, in so far as I pay attention to identity, I do so increasingly as a figure within the ground of my situation. Husserl's procedure of reduction leads the thinker back to her own core identity because this is the location of the core beliefs that provide the intentional content. It requires the perceiver to see himself in the act of perceiving (the eidetic reduction) while simultaneously disregarding concrete lived existence (the transcendental reduction); it creates a worldless transcendental subject, who is constantly in the act of turning back on themselves. This then, says Charles Taylor (2004), creates a model of how human beings relate to the world, which is *through something else*. We see the world through a screen of our own creating. This "something else" starts out in Husserl as normative ideas or beliefs (normative in the sense that they pull all subsequent thought into their orbit), and progresses to include language as mediational structure: language rather than inner forms or ideas existing in some abstract way becomes the vehicle for our intentional constitutive acts.

Despite this move to externalise the process it still remains one where thought is paramount; ideas shape perception and contact with the world. Charles Taylor makes the point that this "through-structure" or "representationalist view" is still a pervasive one. It ties us to the view, he says, that "beliefs are the only accepted denizens of the space of reasons" (Taylor, 2004, 29), because the logic of the representationalist stance drives

the view that it is impossible to get outside our beliefs and language. There is no external reference to which we can have access. For Taylor this is what Wittgenstein meant when he said “A picture has held us captive”. “Picture” here is a metaphor for the representational view of how we encounter things in the world – as a picture held in our mind<sup>60</sup>. I am suggesting that I too have unthinkingly adopted this perspective, and that once it is adopted it frames and shapes everything else, including the relief and support I have taken from the principle of awareness as taught me by Gestalt therapists. I frame awareness as *my* awareness; I constitute *myself as the primary source*; I learn to take responsibility for expressing my self, and for aiming at seeing myself and my part in all that happens to me. These do not seem in themselves to be wrong moves, but I think I have in process got things round the wrong way: I have seen myself, my identity, as primary, and the world has become an idea I think. Well this is what I tell myself – a little harshly perhaps partly for the sake of my rhetoric, but I feel the truth of it; the centripetal spin of my way of being. *I believe that this turning inwards has been degenerative and de-energising for me*. I also believe that in my 50s it is no simple matter to change. How is Merleau-Ponty and my reconnection to Gestalt providing resources for me to do so? These questions involve consideration of how an idea can change a way of being. In this case I follow Merleau-Ponty into an exciting (for me that is) new set of ideas about my relation to the world?

Merleau-Ponty simply starts from a different place from Husserl.

The world is not what I think, but what I live through. I am open to the world, I have no doubt that I am in communication with it, but I do not possess it; it is inexhaustible. ‘There is a world’ or rather ‘There is the world’; I can never completely account for this ever-reiterated assertion in my life (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, x).

Merleau-Ponty asserts that we live first through the world not through ideas about the world: the quotation reiterates his fundamental position (see the previous section) whilst clarifying his belief that we open to **the** world that

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<sup>60</sup> Recent developments in thought have critiqued Husserl’s preoccupation with identity and presence – the way that things are presented to the mind, and the transcendental consciousness that surveys the world. However, arguably the consequences of thinking in this way have been absorbed into taken for granted assumptions about the inaccessibility of the real and the power of our own constituting beliefs and language; the taken for granted nature of the assumptions is, says Charles Taylor, what it means to be held “captive” (Taylor, 2005: 29). Arguably the effect lingers even in those who most fiercely deconstruct the philosophy of identity or presence (the continual return to our own intentional acts) inherent in Husserl. For example Patrick Burke argues that Derrida takes on “the language of transcendental reflection” when he seeks to remove difference from the realm of being a concept with a presence of its own that can be questioned, and assert it as a fundamental structure of our mind, *which, as such, is then unquestionable*. (Burke, 1997: 61-62).

is shared by all. Our common sense feeling that there is a single world for us founds, for Merleau-Ponty, a belief that we start, before thought, in contact with a shared reality. “The real has to be described not constructed or formed”. He asserts that: “My field of perception is constantly filled with a play of colours, noises and fleeting tactile sensations .....which I ...immediately ‘place’ in the world, without ever confusing them with my daydreams. Equally constantly I weave dreams round things. I imagine people and things whose presence is not incompatible with the context, yet who are not in fact involved in it: they are ahead of reality, in the realm of the imaginary”(ibid). In our perceptual world of embodied contact, he says, we have no doubts about what is real. Yes, we might occasionally make mistakes as when we set our body to lift a heavy weight to discover it is made of paper, but the mistakes only confirm our grasp of the real – it is the comparison we make to conclude that something is not real. Perceptually we move with confidence of the world in which we exist; we are naturally able to “incorporate the most surprising phenomena” and also to reject “the most plausible figments” (ibid). Our perceived contact with the world is not: “an act, a deliberate taking up of a position it is the **background** from which all acts stand out, and is presupposed by them.” (ibid). The world is the ultimate ground of our situated being. How though is this compatible with the unique gearing, which our bodies have to our situation? Surely this suggests fundamental difference even at this level of perceptual fore-contact?

Recently I was struggling to explain my reading of Merleau-Ponty to Edwin and Sonia Nevis over the dinner table when I found myself, in my inarticulateness, reaching for dinner plates and glasses to try to explain what I was taking from all this. I grabbed hold of a dinner plate to designate as the world. Then I placed a side plate within the world as my situation. Then an upturned glass inside my situation as my self. I asked them to imagine the glass as having two vertical levels: the lower one was tightly geared to my situation, which created for me a foundational perceptual aspect and an upper conceptual aspect. The conceptual aspect was disconnected from my situation and the world by my perceptual foundation. This I said gave a horizontal and a vertical field to my existence. I existed *horizontally* through the interlocked fields of situation and world; I also existed *vertically* through the interlocked fields of my conceptual and perceptual worlds. The world was shared with all other creatures. My situation was interlocked with the world but also geared to my perception; it made for a kind of inter-world. While resorting to a drawing when trying to describe the same system to my friend Margareta I replaced the glass with a house built on two levels and the side plate with a garden. I imagined the lower floor of the house as open to the garden and invaded by the plants from the garden, while the upstairs was pristine and clean. The elements of a conceptual self, a situated self and the world stayed the same: I called the drawing: my situated self – the house of being.

Now I recall the drawing by turning to the pages in my notebook I’m reminded of the other building metaphor I used for my body in my poem –

the palace. The house is more modest an image; less monolithic and more disturbed by its garden with which, in the lower floor, it is intertwined. When I later described the drawing to Sonia in a phone call her first reaction was to see the plant life that fills the garden and invades the house as representing introjections. In Gestalt therapy these are taken for granted assumptions swallowed whole without (following the oral metaphor of Perls) being chewed over before being ingested. I take from this – or read into it – an implicit preference for the rationality of the upper floor; there is a suggestion that it is “wrong” for other to remain foreign to us, and that it must be completely assimilated to ourselves<sup>61</sup>. I notice by comparison my own romantic attachment to the wild flowering of the garden and the invaded lower floor. I find myself trying to value the engulfment that defies assimilation. *I am taken by the incompleteness that Merleau-Ponty sets alongside the conviction he has in our mutual contact with a shared real world.* We are in touch with but do not own the real: “the real is a closely woven fabric. It does not await our judgement....”. *The world is “inexhaustible” source, which is beyond our “possession”.* Is there than an interim state in which we recognise the introjects as a form of the larger than us world; in which they can be valued and inquired into without being assimilated to us? An element here of patient acceptance, perhaps associated with a “letting be” and even a “complying with”? Slackening the voracious mind as in a yoga? Is this the stance that we – in our partness – should take towards the larger field of our ground: our situatedness in the world?

This clustering of questions invokes a surge of feeling in me as I write. It’s a warm flowing up-welling in me; hard to find the words, but I reach for “joy”; although it is not quite as dramatic a feeling as I normally associate with that word. It’s a gentler suffusion. I remember a similar feeling I had when writing an earlier part of the thesis and that helps me to locate the feeling more accurately. It is that feeling of strange familiarity again as if I have just said something I knew and was re discovering; that path again crossing into an ancient land that in some way I once inhabited – a land that was clearly once inhabited, but is now empty of people; a place in which is deposited the sediment of an old way of being, which turns out to be my own past. Merleau-Ponty asserts that the world pre exists us and “provides the natural setting of, and field for, all my thoughts and all my explicit perceptions” It leads him onto encourage me to look to this shared world for any glimmer of truth. It is not, he says, to the inner man that we should look for truth but to the world: “there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, xi). How do I understand this?

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<sup>61</sup> An introject consists of material – a way of acting, feeling, evaluating – which you have taken into your system of behaviour, but which you have not assimilated in such fashion as to make it a genuine part of your organism. You took in on the basis of a forced acceptance, a forced (and therefore pseudo) identification, so that, even though you will now resist its dislodgement as if it were something precious, it is actually a foreign body. (PHG, 189)

The world exceeds us spatially and also temporally in the sense that my reflection removes into thought a dynamically unfolding relationship that is passing on even as “I” remove it: when I think the feeling it is already passing as my body’s relationship with its situation moves on. So are my thoughts permanently playing catch up? Is this displacement one reason why the world of thought does not coincide exactly with the perceptual world? The question provokes me to think on to another reason why I might not quite coincide with my primordial experience; this is because this experience speaks the language of the body before expression in thought – is language then an effort in translation and like all translation does it run the risk of inadequate equivalence? Merleau-Ponty says that language is the means of removing ourselves from the world of perceptual intertwining: “The sensorial agent = the body-----The ideal agent = speech” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 171). The subjectivity of the body is an “incarnate subjectivity”; it is “not the psychic in the sense of the psychological” (ibid, 167). Merleau-Ponty refers to this primordial perceptual being in the world as “The brute or wild Being” in order to capture its fundamental stature. He also calls it “wild or vertical world” resonating with the idea of the vertical field that is created by our rising from the ground to balance against the planet’s gravity. The implication is that we have come from the ground into figuration as we have come into thought: hence the two floors of the house of my being. This perceptual world “is a world of silence” (ibid, 170) which is “hidden forever or provisionally – the mode of being of antipodes.” It is a “world that is before expression [yet] sustains it from behind”(ibid, 167) (as the ground supports the figure). How might I explore – inquire into that which is “hidden forever or provisionally”?

I would like to respond to this flurry of questions concerning the ground by illustrating an attempt to work with the ground in a consulting assignment. This case I use is only partly successful, and both more and the less successful parts will enable these intellectual reflections. The case will also provide an opportunity to ground further conceptual discussion.



#### 4.4. Exploring 'ground' in my consulting

This case contributes to the thesis by enabling me to show how my practice as a consultant was responding to my reflections on the Gestalt ground and the phenomenological idea of being situated in the world. It illustrates me seeking to help my client explore the situatedness of her life. This is the main focus of attention for this case in this section. However the case also provides me with another experience of detaching myself from the consulting situation and this provides the basis for reflection in the concluding paragraphs of the chapter.

The background to this case was that a long term client<sup>62</sup>, who I was supporting as he retired from an international company, had asked me (October 2004) to speak with a more junior colleague of his (W) who was facing an important career choice (they were part of the same professional network but had no direct reporting relationship). I was uncertain about aspects of the situation to begin with, because career counselling is not really what I do. My friend was unworried by that, believing that there were some deeper issues that needed exploring, concerning her motivation and deeper life choices; he thought that more practical advice on opportunities inside the company, or on concrete opportunities elsewhere might come from someone else. I understood this to mean that he thought that some kind of inquiry into the background to her choices might be helpful, and this felt like territory where my lack of technical knowledge in career counselling would be less of a problem. I spoke on the phone with her on three occasions in October/November 2004, and it became clear that she was in a tangle of indecision about whether to leave the company or not, and what she might do if she left – after fifteen years (she was in her late thirties with three small children) she was feeling uncertain about corporate life. This was potentially difficult as the company was paying my fee so I asked her if she would mind speaking with our mutual friend (who had not yet left the company) to see if an inquiry encompassing the leaving issue would be in order. She did in the end speak with him, and I received a phone call from our mutual friend, who said that he was not surprised, and I should go ahead if I thought I could help. I phoned W and we decided to meet in the Hague in Holland where she worked, which we did on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2004.

I wondered how to approach this meeting, given that there would not be budget for either of us to fly across the North Sea again (although we could continue to have phone calls). What might give value in a day? My thinking about this question was influenced by my attendance at two demonstrations by family therapists in November 2004. They were both working with a process called Constellating<sup>63</sup>. I had been drawn to these demonstrations

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<sup>62</sup> My work often arrives like this through a network of pre existing connections with executives who hold developmental or other budgets.

<sup>63</sup> [www.familyconstellations-usa.com/about.htm](http://www.familyconstellations-usa.com/about.htm)

because they promised to provide a method for using bodily contact to unpick systemic issues within families. As I was at that time in the process of dialogue between my Gestalt inheritance and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body I wanted to see how this process worked at the physical level. The process was extremely interesting (in 2005 I undertook some training); however it was also a bit impractical as it relied on a relatively large group of volunteers (12-20) to represent the family situations that were problematic for clients. What I took from it at the time of this case was reinforcement for bringing bodily feeling, and attending to the client's ground into my work. I was excited that this might be one way in which the intellectual work around Gestalt and Merleau-Ponty might find practical expression. Before I travelled to Holland I reminded myself of some basic Gestalt methods concerning physicality in therapy by consulting Gaie Houston's books (1998, 2003) and made these notes in my book under the clients name:

A solution orientated discussion

- What has moved her to be here with me? Feeling state?
- How would she notice if things changed in a desirable way?
  - a. Search for 2/3/ things
- Desired state = 10. Non achievement = 0
  - a. Life in general
  - b. This particular issue { What can a tell b?
- Miracle question
  - a. Keep looking for levels of detail
- Being in focus and out of focus
- Writing as well as speaking

When I look back over the papers from January 2005<sup>64</sup> in which this account was first written up I notice that the first thing I note about arriving is related to the place within which my client worked. Here is an extract from my transfer papers in January 2005 to illustrate my noticing about place.

I was in The Hague at a [x] Co Head Office building, preparing to meet a senior manager..... I took particular pains, while waiting for the client to meet me, to walk around the open spaces on the ground floor of the building, taking in the absence of people, the expanses of modernist architecture, noticing an involuntary shiver of coldness and a heavy sense of insignificance; also noticing my admiration for the sweep of the interior roof line, and the rich mixture of materials – glass, stone metal, brick and wood. Here in the heart of this multi-national I fancied some confirmation for the precise yet distant organisation of the engineer, a priority for rules and procedures over responsiveness and flexibility (allied also to some understanding of how this kind of culture might serve the purpose of the

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<sup>64</sup> The case is described in a piece called "Body and Process" that I wrote at the beginning of 2005. This paper was subsequently included in the papers I prepared to support my successful transfer from MPhil to PhD programme at CARPP (January, 2005)

system). Yet I was also conscious of having taken a warning from MP about this kind of information – that it was inherently ambiguous, and in need of further refinement or clarification, perhaps in dialogue with my client.

This description seems to be retrospectively supported by the attention Brady places on “self conscious knowledge about being in place” and attempts at “self conscious immersion” (Brady, 2005: 981). Such a process is rendered further significance because this is my clients “place” – in some unique way for her this is a part of her situation. Brady speaks of “Personal space [as] a collecting centre for experience and identity construction” (ibid: 982). Tracking my own feeling for her place could be considered an important aspect of entering her situation. If she is to be found in the world and not in some inner place<sup>65</sup> then am I looking and feeling into where she will be “found”?

I also think this being in place in relation to this thesis. This case description is documenting a part of my life world – trying to show me in the places in which I work. These large anonymous places are typical of where I work. The sense of being a stranger in them was what I sought to capture in the case description at the beginning of Chapter Two. How does this reflect onto my interests as they emerge into the thesis: for example, with the concatenation of themes around emergence and excitement? It strikes me that one of the things evidenced by the early case (Chapter Two), and also by this one is how I move to immerse myself in the place of my client. There is a “sensuous-intellectual continuum” involved in these processes of immersion – I feel and think my way into them. We notice aspects of this with this thesis. Not only do I *set out* to explore emergence, and excitement (I’m using a simplification of the themes as I have described to help me make my point), but I also *wait to see* where excitement emerges as I journey with my inquiries. If the doctorate can be thought of as a place then I seem to be experiencing the place as a part of deciding what I will do. In this sense could we say that fundamentally my method is to accompany the thesis as it emerges from the larger journey of the doctoral research? Has the doctoral research also not had some of the qualities of accompanying an emergence?

W and I talk for about two hours in the morning. We are in a conference sitting around the corner of a large conference table that almost completely fills the room. She has brought along a questionnaire on emotional intelligence that has been scored for her within the company. We speak about it although, as I tell her, I’m not really qualified to interpret it. I take the opportunity to share with her some of my feelings as I entered the building. I ask, “what kind of emotional life might be encouraged by these kind of places?” We wonder together at the contrast between this kind of

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<sup>65</sup> “.....man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: xi).

place and our respective homes – how do we respond differently in each place? As we discuss this and other aspects of her life I realise that she is open, not only to her particular problem, but also to the way she habitually approaches problems like this. For example, she tells me she has spoken to friends and family about her next career move, but the advice appears contradictory. As she talks about others in her life, and as I feel our presence together in that corporate meeting room I conceive an idea. With hindsight I can see that it owes something to my observing the group process of constellating family issues, and to my own Gestalt background in so far as Gestalt therapists make use of physical movement (Huston, 1995). It also provides evidence of my growing interest in the ground – in the situatedness of all persons. I tell her what I have in mind without letting on that I have just invented the process, and have never done it before – I want to create a confident space where she will feel comfortable enough to do the work, and my omission seems justified in these terms.

Here is what I did next as I wrote it up in *Body and Process*, one of the pieces of writing I submitted for my transfer in January 2005.

I proposed [to W\_ my client] a *mock meeting* to which we would invite significant others to discuss her issue..... We concentrated on discussing who would come, and, aided by the information revealed in our earlier conversation, we agreed to invite: her past (she referred to the “thin red line” that connected the events of her past [to this current situation], and we invited this line); her future self; P\_, a senior xyz Co manager, who she knew and respected; F\_, a close personal friend; and her husband, H\_. I wrote the names of the invited guests on sheets of paper, and asked her to go round the table in the conference room, where we were meeting to make place settings for each person. I then asked her to go to each place in turn to give the advice that person would give to her. I told her that I would ask her only two questions from each place: “what do you notice in your body as you take each place”, and then, “what advice do you have for W (the client)?” I told her I would [sit in the corner away from the table and] make notes in particular of the advice she received. Then I explained a short procedure for moving which involved physically leaving the last place, standing up stamping her feet, and taking a series of breaths, before slipping into the next seat. I then concentrated on doing three things: taking notes of the ‘visitors’ advice; keeping my client on track and unembarrassed by what she was doing; and carefully accenting her reports of shifts in bodily state so as to support this least familiar part of the process. [At the end I also gave her my write up of the advice she had been given]. (“Body and Process”, January, 2005: 45)

It strikes me that the process I designed places less emphasis on *seeing herself* from different perspectives and more on *seeing how she was situated*. Although I was not using this language in the transfer papers, or with my client, the case appears to me now as an attempt to help her find her direction in her world, rather than inside her self. This also helped support a process she had already embarked on, which was seeking advice from her friends and family so, in this sense, the process builds on something she was already doing. The journey around the table re-creates

on smaller scale as a kind of simulation the larger journey she was already making as she engaged with her world.<sup>66</sup>

The distinction between encouraging her to look inside herself in some way and looking to her situation in the world is for me subtle but significant. My focus arises from my growing interest in the way people are located in situations – my interest in the ground of life. Seeing *herself* from different perspectives carries for me implications of multiple personality – it would invoke a psychological move where the focus would be more towards an interior landscape (despite the *calling in* of characters out in the world). Here I am exteriorising more by having the client see how she behaves in the different situations in which she exists.

I was surprised by how much information became available when I just concentrated on the physical, such as changes in voice tone, body posture and emotional loading of the voice. She was, for example, mischievous and playful as her husband; in tears as her past; slow, contemplative, and softly spoken as her friend; very brief yet sympathetic as the [company] manager. In the conversation that followed we both registered our surprise at the richness of this part of the process. (Body and Process, January, 2005: 46)

Although the process design was grounded in my recent experiences it was not very explicitly framed for the client; moreover it was not very explicitly clear to me why I was doing this. My intervention had some qualities of an intuitive movement. In such circumstances I might ask, *looking afresh at the process design as an answer to a question, what question or questions was I, as a process consultant, responding to?*

Distancing myself from the event with this kind of question, sends me into looking again at the circumstances rather than just racking my memory. It would seem reasonable to respond to such questions with answers such as, how might the client engage with her situatedness so as to inform her, and support her in her choices? How can she gain support from her situation? If another process consultant was to press for a more theoretical answer the response might be to draw on Brady, and speak of trying to open a space where the client could *experience* their place, or home, in the world (Brady, 2005: 985). The emphasis on “experience” allows in the idea of helping the client towards a *sensual* as well as intellectual engagement with their place or home in the world. This would engage the client with the way in which they were held within a social context (Campbell, 2000: 9-10) and help them to look for external sources of support, rather than just look to solve

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<sup>66</sup> She followed this meeting by going back into a further round of discussion with friends and family, and quite rapidly decided to leave the company, and to take a job with a smaller more entrepreneurial business. We had three more meetings on the telephone before she left the company. I then lost touch with her. In this sense I did not accompany her. At our last meeting she gave me permission to use this case in my transfer papers. I have disguised her name, the name of the company, and those of all the others involved.

their problem themselves. In this way the intervention might be framed around the proposition Brady suggests: “personal space [is] a collecting centre for personal experience” (ibid: 982).

I experience this as quite a useful way of inquiring back into my own process. I think of how I might respond to others asking me the question highlighted in the previous paragraph – an action researcher for example. I think then I would be inclined to respond by saying that the intervention was designed to enable the client to explore their experiential ways of knowing (Heron, 1996: 2-3; Reason and Bradbury, 2001: 9). The client experiences again the qualities of her relationship with the people in her life, even though she might not have been able to fully articulate these had I just asked her. In the event in the following discussion we were able to make some connections between bodily feeling, and steps she might take to realise that potential for support. She left the consultation with a plan to go back to her friend and her father (in particular) to have further conversations. In both cases she told her correspondents something about the mock conversation, and she reported to me in a subsequent phone call how, in the case of her father, this had led to a more intimate, and helpful encounter. My notes don't reveal that we had much discussion about how to approach the people in the best way (she took it on herself to tell about the mock conversation), but this would also seem to be an obvious possibility in the method. It also occurs to me now, that the conversation around the experience could have been filled out in other ways; for example the client and I might have inquired into what kind of support had been offered in other circumstances. Overall, the attention to experiential knowing seems to open up the possibilities of less focus on *who* she was, and more on *how* she was in her entwining with different situations of her life. This might then support a fuller contact between client and consultant where there might be a mutual exchange about being in a family, or with friends, and how they supported her or not (I feel this as an unrealised potential rather than anything that happened – more about this in the final section of the paper as I bring a critical eye back to bear on this case).

### *Sensuality and experience*

In these paragraphs I extend the connection between experience and knowing by exploring the sensual nature of experience and how this is attended to through a discipline of slowing down. I recognise that this has always been an aspect of my consulting, although my current thinking is bringing this aspect more to the fore. Recognising sensuality helps me to see the vital role it plays in experiential ways of knowing.

Now I also notice the element of *slowing down* that is intrinsic to the process I designed. The questions resound in their simplicity like a mantra while the movement of her body around the room with its intervals of standing, shaking and sitting afresh adds to a dance like quality: quite stately and measured. The simplicity of question and movement added to a sense that time was slowing down: just the slow movement round the circle of the table, and the two questions. This also seems to me to deepen the

experiential qualities. I'm now beyond what I noted and what I can remember, but I would like to speculate a little to extend thinking about this process and ways of knowing. It seems to me that in interventions like this slowing down works like a form of *sensuous abstraction* in the same way as it might for a gourmet (Todes, 2001: 272-276). Completion is deferred in favour of savouring the relationship. I might also say that completion is "inhibited." In this sense the phenomena (it might be an act with another person such as having sex, or a thing such as stroking a fabric, or a process such as listening to music, or looking at a painting) is held open for longer: our experience of the person, thing, situation is prolonged to possibly be deepened.

Seen from this perspective might I also understand this thesis more clearly as an exercise in experiential knowing? I'm trying to convey some of the *feel* for aspects of my life world (Strake, 2005: 454-455). I'm also following writing practices that are aimed at providing an *experience of the journey*, such as by editing lightly, and speaking of what I see and feel as it occurs. I'm reminded here of Stewart when she speaks of keeping a track of the trace of things (Stewart, 2005: 1040). Experiential knowing then seems to be encouraged by processes of *interrupting* what is normally completed automatically. If I had asked W "what advice does your father have – or do you think he would like to give you?" my client and I might have achieved the same effect as my experiment, if I had been a skilful enough interlocutor, inquiring into her feelings as well as her thoughts, encouraging her in imaginative transference; however, the process I designed seems to me to provide more opportunity for her to engage with her situations, and to disengage from her situation with me. I move from the centre of her vision into a more peripheral place, and free her to roam. I interrupt the completion of her ways of going on in that situation by offering an opportunity to connect to other situations in her life: there is a kind of *fattening out*, which also seems to me to have *sensual qualities*.

This quality of sensual engagement also seems on reflection to have been present in the earlier case I reported at the beginning of Chapter Two although I did not highlight this at the time. Here is another extract from the paper I wrote on that case in 2001, which I believe illustrates the point.

The building was being renovated so all the coffee machines had been moved out of our area: the nearest one was two floors and a long walk away. However, we did have an empty kitchen as part of our suite of offices together with coffee making equipment. I ordered coffee from the building supervisor and on my way to work the following morning bought milk and bread. Armed with these supplies I set up the kitchen. This was a large well-lit room with a stunning view of the comings and goings of the oil supply ships in the old harbour. When I filled the kitchen with the smell of fresh coffee and fresh bread it was not difficult to cajole the team away from their computers to come and eat and drink together. .... My milk and bread buying became a tradition within the team. It became generative of our shared life. We went on to establish eating and drinking as a tradition of the team, arranging dinners with sponsors and lunchtime visits

to harbour side pubs. (Farrands, 2001: 7)

The kitchen, the smell of coffee and fresh bread, the interruption of the team's isolated thinking; breaking bread together. These all seem to me to support the possibility of sensuous abstraction as it might be reflected in relationships within the team. It occurs to me now that the setting up of the kitchen was partly for myself. I test this thought by proposing a question that slightly distances me from the situation. What question was the kitchen intervention in response to? One answer seems to be possible was that I was trying to create a home for myself, which might support me in making a contribution. I appear to take a creative initiative, which also creates a place for experiential knowing within the team (Brady, 2005: 982). This makes more sense than "role" – I didn't want to be a caterer to the team!

The question of how I distanced myself from the situation as I designed the intervention is another interesting aspect of this case. From the moment that I design the intervention I begin to withdraw myself. My client takes centre stage and I withdraw to watch, ask one of two questions and observe. This strategy, of course, bears comparison with what I did in my supervision group, and bears on the question of detachment. I notice my detachment now as an aspect of my skilfulness as a process consultant. This does not prevent detachment being less generative in other aspects of my life. It may be that my very skilfulness is a problem for me more generally in my life; an example of my accomplished self blocking my energy in some way perhaps? I will return to the way competence might be a problem in this respect in a short while in the closing section of the paper. First though I wish to engage more fully with how the idea of being situated in the world is changing the way in which I conceive of myself as an inquirer.



#### 4.5. Experiencing, inquiring and knowing

In this section I draw conclusions of a theoretical and a personal nature. Theoretically I reflect upon how to present my new understanding of myself as situated in the world – especially as an inquirer. What does my revised self-conception mean for the kind of questions I ask? Personally, I find myself disturbed by aspects of the W case as they relate to my detachment from my client. I can see how this was a helpful move in the case but I also worry about how it is similar to the kind of detachment that provoked my crisis in the supervision group. This leads me to recognise how paradoxically I can be selfless and selfish. My new way of thinking is shown to be causing me to raise difficult questions about my own paradoxical nature.

All human inquiries might benefit from inquiring into the complex bodily states of those involved, including the inquirer. From the perspective of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body this arises because each human being is already fundamentally, and primordially connected to their situation in the world. This type of fundamental connection is specifically incorporated into action research through the adoption of a participative world-view (Reason and Bradbury, 2001: 6-8). Merleau-Ponty also believed that to start to think about our situation was to start to separate our-self from it – to *look upon it* rather than to be *in it*. This same sentiment is incorporated into action research by Reason and Heron who distinguish propositional ways of knowing from knowing through “empathy and resonance” (2001: 183). Heron further relates participation with resonance and feeling:

...[experiential knowledge is] knowledge through participation in, and resonance with, one or more beings in the unified field of being ; the knowledge, in short, that comes with feeling... (Heron, 1992: 162-163)

This could be a Merleau-Ponty speaking. Furthermore there is general recognition that whilst awareness can shift the boundary between tacit experienced knowledge and explicit propositional knowledge (Depraz, Varela and Vermersch, 2002) not everything can be made explicit, because the world is suffused with possibility and latency. It follows that some element of implicit or latent knowledge is likely to be present in all action inquiries. I would like to examine this claim by examining the following Exhibit, which proposes four categories of phenomenological territory as a way of summarising the discussion so far. I have included a column that suggests possible inquiry approaches to each “territory” and followed up with a description. This description draws together material from the chapter so far (supplementing with new knowledge in a small number of cases) and proposes how this might be useful for an action researcher.

EXHIBIT 4.2: INQUIRY AND EXPERIENCE	
Phenomenological territories	Questions for an action researcher
1 I – Emergence to me; a subject body and integrated consciousness. Inquiry is directed towards the body/consciousness. Preconceptions, habits, inclinations, vague urges, interrupted by possibilities and disjunctions?	What do I normally do in this situation - and why? What am I leaning into? How can I feel differently about this thing? Do I have habitual responses in this situation? Have I felt this before?
2 Things - body as object, and other things emerging within my situation (places, people, objects, ideas, named feelings). Inquiry is directed towards the qualities of things as they appear. They have poise.	How is this thing poised (poising) for best articulation? How can I see it more clearly? What other feelings does it evoke? Is it growing clearer brighter or vaguer/duller? How does this thing empathise with me? How does it respond to me? How open to me?
3 Situation/ground – the context within which all things appear. The location or context of things. Inquiry is oblique and non figural. Sensual engagement at the point of emergence. Inquiry is opening, receiving. How are things wrapped in sensuality and vague (but maybe powerful) sensing?	What is vaguely felt in this situation? How will I say ‘yes’ to this kind of situation? What would the situation have to be to support this thing? What is the question to which the figure is the answer? What other possibilities exist here? How does latency register now with this thing in its situation
4 World –Disturbance of all poise. Penetrates other three territories. Evocation of bewilderment and wonder – maybe fear and joy (death, love).	How am I bewildered? What wondering arises from my bewilderment?

### 1. *Appearing to me*

From the posture of experiential knowing inquiries become increasingly oblique as one progresses into the “situation” and “world” aspects of the chart. The top boxes in the chart focus on a direct assessment of the researcher’s own feeling response to being in the presence of this thing<sup>67</sup> (research project, person, group, idea, object set of circumstances etc), and a testing of felt ground in respect of the thing. Action research takes it as read that the researcher will bring their subjectivity into account in a research project (Torbert, 2001; Heron and Reason, 2001; Ladkin, 2005). None of these authorities restrict the researcher’s self-inquiry to purely propositional forms of knowing. Through the forms of question on the right hand side of the chart I am reinforcing the necessity of penetrating beneath any propositional or other statement. “I’m frustrated by the client” is, I assert, a statement that needs investigating in experiential terms by the researcher in relation to themselves. How am I frustrated by this person? What does it

<sup>67</sup> I would like to use a non technical word with a wide scope so I have selected ‘thing’ rather than ‘phenomenon’, or ‘object’.

feel like now? Here is an example of a famous Gestalt therapist Fritz Perls, encouraging a client to get down to experiential detail. The authors encourage us to notice the prevalence of “What” type questions as ones going to the experience rather than, for example, “why”, which would be likely to take us to propositional forms of knowing. (The form of our questions to ourselves, and others, will be likely to shape the answers we give or receive<sup>68</sup>.) Whilst this is a case from therapy it serves to accentuate the focus on present in the moment experience as a mode of first person inquiry for a action researcher.

L: Feels like a spider

F: *What* do you feel? *What* do you experience personally?

L: Do you mean physically?

F: Physically, emotionally, so far we have had mostly think-think, talk-talk, things.

L: I feel like I’m - there’s a spider sitting on me and I want to go do something.

F: *What* do you experience when the spider sits on you?

L: It feels like black up here.

F: No reactions to the spider? If a spider really would crawl over you now *what* would you experience?

L: Adrenalin and jump and scream.

F: How? (Liz half heartedly brushes away a spider). Again. Spider’s still there....

L: I’d scream and –

F: How? ..... *How* would you scream?

L: I c- I don’t know if I could do it. I can hear it though when I do it. It just comes out.

F: How? (Clarkson and Mackewn, 1993: 94-95. Italics added by the authors)

## 2. *Something in its own right*

The second box from the top of the chart concerns experience of the research object etc as a discrete entity. Although it appears to me it is also something *for itself*. In this thesis I have taken pains to try to recognise the dignity and separateness of things from me – even to the point of endowing my own ideas as other than me in some way. <sup>69</sup>The experiential focus here is on being able to engage with the thing and express it in some way that is as uncluttered as possible by our own pre judgements and prejudices. Merleau-Ponty supports the view that I can never see what is other than me completely clearly – my perception is always bound up in my point of view. Hence the descriptive process has to be one of gradual illumination of self and other. (1962: xiii-xiv). I try to do this by seeking to weave together a

<sup>68</sup> “It often happens that we only become aware of the important facts, if we suppress the question ‘why?’ and then in the course of our investigations these facts lead us to the answer” (Wittgenstein quoted by Watzlawick et al, 1974: 84)

<sup>69</sup> According to Bakhtin, Dostoevsky’s genius lay in his ability to create characters and then give them independent life as a separate (from the author) subjective existence. (Bakhtin, 1984: 5 & 59).

description of myself and the other thing I am engaging with so as not to abstract either one.

### 3. *In a situation*

Inquiry into the territory represented by the third pair of boxes – “situation” – is more oblique, because, by definition, I cannot approach frontally or directly. If I do then this becomes figural for me. Oblique inquiry may involve being alert to vague sensations as they emerge. Stewart (2005) and Brady (2005) offer approaches towards inquiry that involve trying to stay close to the point where things emerge – in other words the point where they start to break up or configure themselves, or the opposite where they break up and disappear into vague sensuality again. I would describe this as a strategy for trying to stay alert to the situatedness of things. Eliot’s phrase “the unknown, remembered gate” (Eliot: 222) captures the elusive, paradoxical nature of this kind of knowing. Think of catching something out of the corner of one’s eye while attending to something else. Think of a sudden intimation of danger that causes a driver to reduce speed approaching a corner (an example of a mixing of practical knowing – driving a car – and experiential knowing. You may also formulate a proposition – I’m going too fast!). Think of that “something” that draws a smile from another. Experiential knowing does not exist in a vacuum as can be seen by the other representative questions. We can formulate specific questions to induce or encourage us to bring into awareness what might be implicit; in these situations our answers are likely to arrive with surrounding feelings or other premonitions. Merleau-Ponty says that everything that appears to us comes wrapped in possibility and latency that is present but not visible. As he describes the potentiality or latency of our situations Merleau-Ponty is anxious not to stray too far from in the moment experience: invisibility refers to the “depth” of the visible present to which it is a “lining”. The invisible for him is an “*operative, militant, finitude.*” (Visible and Invisible: 305): a *dimension* of possibility. In this way Merleau-Ponty is seeking to stress that this invisibility is presented with the visible - it is not some remote and distant state. It is this type of present, but invisible, that Varela and Shear commend as a potentially rich ground for inquiry (1999: 4-5). It is the territory I have been drawn to in this thesis as I seek for sources of energy and excitement in my life through emergent process.

### 4. *In the world*

The obliquely present “situation” *shades into* something that is totally other (not just the other side of something I conceive), which is named “world” in the chart. This invisible is not just the absence of *some thing* in the sense that there is now an absence of tea in my mug, or there is another side to this laptop, or an increasing feeling of tension behind my eyes now as I tap away. These things may be thought of as graduations of something in my situation (that is contained in the previous boxes). If you like numbers then you might like to think of a reduction down to zero, but not into negative numbers. In thinking the category “world” I’m wanting to open a space for dropping below the horizon into true negativity. As Sue Cataldi *graded* emotion she inquired into different depths of emotional experience (1993:

27). She remarked that some emotions dropped into a space where they were considered “blind”<sup>70</sup>, and where they seemed to suffuse our whole being. We are totally “in” them (falling in love; in the depths of despair; overcome by grief), and can get no external point of leverage. This is a radical kind of absence that is normally felt like hole, or deep pit in existence. Experientially it occurs as a dis-possessive force, which is fundamentally felt or sensually experienced. It may be deeply troubling – a kind of existential anxiety, or it may be fundamentally unsettling as in bewildering, or it may be experienced as truly awe inspiring. “World” captures the grading off of experiential knowing into something that can only be experienced in forms of “not”; it seeks to register a form of experience that is not subordinated to a consciousness – a primordial openness to the world. Something not positively created by an imaginative consciousness. This is by definition beyond active inquiry. We open (or not) to such forces as they surge in. Simpson and French borrow from the poet Keats the phrase “negative capability” for the ability to stay in this place and still function (Simpson and French, 2006: 245-255).<sup>71</sup> They see the ability to stay open to the other in the face of a desire to either close or impose our own construction as a hallmark of dialogue. They consider it particularly significant for leaders, who are often faced with choices about whether to make themselves vulnerable in the face of many opportunities to never do so. The movement into radical otherness seems to me to justify on its own a separate category from “situation”, but there is another reason also for its separation. This is the realm in which we powerfully connect to the experience of other human beings – and maybe other creatures as well. Senses of bewilderment, wonder, and, more physical, sensations such as standing against gravity, or being besottedly overwhelmed by love, or recoiling against a sudden clap of thunder, are shared experiences, and evidence of a shared existence in a shared world. At the end of Chapter Three I sought to occupy the space of a colleague by drawing on common experiences of being in tears in front of others, and used my writing to also wonder what it must be like to be an impoverished child in Sao Paulo.

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<sup>70</sup> “We have noted some ‘dark’ dimensions to emotional experience – some space of nonfeeling; and we have seen that certain emotions (like shock, love and rage) are regarded as ‘blind’.....From our ordinary speech we have discovered that the ‘deeper’ the emotion, the more appropriate it is to apply the locution *in* to it. We say, for example, that we are ‘in love’ or ‘in mourning,’ ‘enraged,’ ‘in wonder,’ or ‘in terror.’” (Cataldi: 27)

<sup>71</sup> The phrase occurs in a letter to his two brothers dated 21,27 December 1817: “...at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously – I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason”. (Keats, 2002: 41-42)

*How do I feel, what am I thinking as the chapter ends?*

This section, and indeed this whole chapter, has concerned itself with being in the world, and with the world as “ground”. Mainly the focus has been on theorising with the aid of new knowledge of existential phenomenology I have acquired over the research journey. But this theorising has also evoked my own experience – my own feelings. I would like to end the chapter by just opening up a little to what comes as I let my writing self fall into the ending, guided by the questions, what am I feeling, what am I thinking? This will aid the thesis by seeking to demonstrate some things I have been talking about concerning emergent form, also it may serve to bring the chapter to a satisfactory conclusion, and might pose some questions for the next chapter.

My intention in adding the chart contained in Exhibit 4.2, and providing the associated commentary, was to summarise my developing understanding of how to theorise about myself, and my experience in the world. Doing so enabled a reflection on Gestalt, phenomenology and action research in relation to experience, and knowing. I found that writing to connect up the three areas of thought sharpened what it was I thought I knew about these different territories of knowledge. This “sharpening” was rather like that feeling, of which I have spoken before, of being on a path that I feel I already know, but have forgotten. Writing these sentences now also brings to mind the people in the different communities that support these different perspectives: people I know in CARPP, Gestalt and phenomenology. I also imagine with a feeling of warmth, these people being able to better locate me within their different traditions. I imagine myself being welcomed – taken in. This feeling reflects back to illuminate the other side of this – not being a part but being marginalised. Something that does not feel quite so positive, but is a familiar aspect of the doctoral journey as a whole. If I attend to the emerging feeling more closely, and try to track it, then it emerges to be named as a kind of loneliness. As I *write the word “lonely”*, the feeling blossoms into a more jagged dislocated feeling, like a shell-burst throwing out splinters. Then what comes is a kind of familiarity – like a kind of home for me. As a result it’s not a completely negative feeling. As I write this sentence I realise that something else is being evoked. It is a feeling of fate – this is how it has to be. My body stiffens. I’m bracing myself, as if I was going to be hurt and I should be brave. It’s heroic, but with a difference. I know that I can’t win – I’m kind of sacrificing myself. What might these feelings and premonitions mean in relation to the thesis?

One thing my reflection does is to move me to think again about the W case. The other aspect that comes to mind is that my intervention involved me carefully positioning myself on the edge of action. In the circumstances it led to a creative and elegant solution, but I wonder how much of the design was informed by a life position of mine. As I said at the time of describing the case the feeling reminds me a little of the event that featured so strongly at the beginning of Chapter Three when I introduced a 360 degree type process into my supervision group; that also involved me in sitting out from the main action. In the case of the W consulting case, and in many others,

this approach of marginalising myself to some degree is highly successful. One aspect of this I recognise is that clients have reported to me that they experience me as being quite selfless in service of their needs. Let me pursue that a little as a next step as I feel it might be taking me somewhere important.

First some evidence of what I asserted at the end of the last paragraph. I want to produce a piece of feedback for us to look at together, and then use that to take on the reflection started above. The feedback dates from August 2004, four months before the W case, when I was coming to the end of an assignment with the Group Human Resources Director of a large UK retailer. I asked her if she would provide me with feedback, and if I could record the conversation for possible use in my PhD. She agreed. The total conversation took ten minutes and I have extracted a paragraph from the centre of the conversation. I will refer to her as B (she asked that don't use her name or the name of the company). It's relevant to know that I have known her as a client for about ten years (and before that as a work colleague for about five years). I think it may also be relevant to know that she is successful, and we are about the same age:

R: Because it's the end of a period I wouldn't mind getting some feedback about why you have kept seeing me, I mean when I think of all the people you could speak to....

B: (After five minutes and twenty seconds). You come across extremely well in very senior executive groups, and you flex your style to suit theirs, and try to extract the best from them. You're very, very, very, committed to what you do, and you are *reliable*. You are also in terms of creation...think of all the things you have had to create with me *24 hours before I'm about to do them*, over the telephone. *So responsive, gosh* you know! So the things that matter to me, the contribution, the input is at a high level, its *reliable* and it fits the purpose. And the fact that you really are *so flexible, you know, I catch you in the car at 11pm at night* – saying 'I've got to do this tomorrow, what am I going to do?' Also what you did, Rob, was you really *listened and understood* what I was trying to achieve,..." (Private conversation, 19<sup>th</sup> august 2004. Italics added)

There are positive points being made here, and her intention is clearly to be supportive. However I would like to inquire into another aspect of the feedback, which I believe has a bearing on my themes for the thesis. What is this aspect?

In respect of this feedback I notice, now, in March 2007, how differently I'm connecting with it than I was in 2004, when it was first documented for the doctoral journey. Then I was flattered, now I'm slightly dismayed by the emphasis on reliability, flexibility and responsiveness. I appreciate that it is not the whole picture, but I now find the phrase "bending over backwards" comes to mind. On an especially negative reading the feedback almost seems to report servility. Where am I in this account? Elsewhere in the piece B says that I am "modest". Yes, I feel now perhaps too much so. Applying

what I have been learning on the journey, and expressing in this chapter, two questions arise for me: a) how am I taking up and living the consultant's role? b) What effect is this having on the rest of my life? In response to the first question it would seem reasonable to deduce from the strategy case reported at the beginning of Chapter Two, and the W case that I hold strong values about serving my clients, and setting up processes that will be successful for them. I would claim I show signs of being creative and *selfless* in their service. For example the contribution B reports is about responding quickly to her needs, no matter how unreasonable they might be in terms of time of day or length of notice.

As confirmation here is a sentence from an American consultant, giving me feedback when I was on the faculty of a consultant training programme at a Gestalt centre on Cape Cod (he agreed to my using this when I taped it on the 17<sup>th</sup> August 2004).

For example we had a discussion about how we could talk about a particular issue in the group, and I noticed that you were guiding us into – you were working with us - *in a way that mirrored what we were talking about trying to achieve*: talking the talk and walking the walk. Rob you just did it! (Private conversation, 17/08/04)

An orientation towards an approach that could be characterised as selfless service has its good sides. A process consultant could do a lot worse. But it also appears to me that there is a risk that I might become dependent on others for life energy: that I might disappear as Bridget reported. I think here of Parlett's phrase: "on being present in your own life" (2001: 43). Am I present in my own life? The question takes me back to the feedback from B – to being selfless. Am I being too selfless? But I have also been reported as being the opposite – self-indulgent. How might I be both?

Something like movements of selflessness and selfishness seems to me to be behind C's challenge: "where in your life?"<sup>72</sup> She provides a series of questions, which are really directed towards purpose. In a different form these questions seem to strike at the same issues that lie at the heart of my overall doctoral journey. What is my purpose? Where is my energy? Relating this directly to the PhD I think I might also see a type of accentuated responsiveness as supporting a research style that is focused mainly on emergence. This does not strike me as necessarily being a bad thing. I'm adapting myself to the situation and developing an approach to a new situation that draws on skills that I have. But I still have to answer the question, concerning whether this helps me to achieve my purpose, in engaging with new sources of excitement and energy at this stage in my life.

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<sup>72</sup> Ideas – what practical outcomes? For what end? Your learning? What do differently? Making a difference with your clients? To what end? Where in your life? (Body and Process, January 2005)



My inquiry seems to be opening into my personal world in a deeper and troubling way. Am I blocking my energy through being selfless – disappearing. Does this relate to the opposite - being self-centred? What do I stand for? Where am I in this? I notice a dull ache behind my eyes, and a feeling of dissatisfaction. I had imagined some kind of full stop for this chapter after the adumbration of the chart, but now something else is opening. What is it?

At this point I was uncertain what to do next. I felt a bit burdened by the chart and the abstract commentary: I was conscious of the dull ache behind my eyes. I left my study and went into the kitchen with its large window overlooking the garden. Following a dim intuition<sup>73</sup> that I should try to do something simpler, and more physical, with the ideas I had been working with I took hold of an A4 sheet of paper, and began to play. I cut off a number of  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch strips from the long side, and began to use the paper to create a recursive connection between the different elements of Exhibit 4.2. I drew the elements on a strip of paper and then looped the paper back to connect the ends. After a number of experiments I simplified the presentation down as follows.

On one side of one of the strips I drew two thick red parallel lines, running the length of the strip, and on the other two black lines. Then I divided each side into equal halves. On the red side I wrote “Embodied Self.....” and then in the adjacent red half I wrote, “....in a Situation”. On the black side I wrote “Other....” on the reverse of the “Embodied Self”, and “in a Situation” in the adjacent black space.

Embodied Self.....	in a Situation
Other.....	in a Situation

Then I gave the paper a twist and joined together the two ends to make a mobius strip. I held the object up in front of my eyes, turning it around, and noticing the way each sector flowed into the next. The red side of the paper joined with the black side at the point where “Other” flowed into the “Situation” of the “Embodied self”, whilst on the other side of the strip the transition from red to black occurred where “Embodied self” flowed into the “Situation” of the “Other”. This was simpler than my chart, but also seemed to approximate better the dynamic and complex involvements of life. My self was presented as the other side of ‘other’ (where ‘other’ could include myself as an object body). Having them this close – as sides of each other - seemed to represent the phenomenological insight that it is difficult to disentangle self from other. Also “I” flowed into my situation on one side,

<sup>73</sup> This really is about as much as I can say. I cannot trace back any deliberate thinking here. I just wanted to play with my hands and see if some object held in those hands would change things at all.

and into the situation of the “Other” as well. Then the whole strip sat there in a shared world.

I looked at the mobius strip on my kitchen table, sitting there shining in its own space. It was in the world with me, now quite separate but created by me. It was part of me and not so. The twist in the strip confused “inner” and “outer” and seemed to better represent the profundity of surfaces than my chart. I also felt myself encouraged to trace sequences around the figure in a never ending recursion: Embodied self.....in a Situation.....Other.....in it's Situation....Embodied Self. I returned to my study and draped the small object over the head of my table lamp where it sat quite contentedly.

I felt better but still had an aching head. I looked down at the expectant Feste. “Perhaps you’re right”, I said “let’s go for a walk”. He responds with enthusiasm so we get ourselves ready and head for the river path.

#### *Postscript on ideas in Chapter Four*

Finally, as I look back on this chapter I ask, have I not been moved by ideas during the doctoral journey? Is this not an argument in favour of the primacy of the imaginative conceptual world? Yes, I reply, I have been very supported and moved by ideas on the whole of the journey, especially those from phenomenology, as I have shown in my writing. However, I believe that I have also shown that the ideas that I have engaged with have arisen in a context, and that it is the ideas in context that have proved to be particularly compelling. For example, I have described how I was moved to engage with the ideas of Merleau-Ponty through a sense of dim familiarity, which arose partly from my Gestalt heritage, and from other existential features; for example Merleau-Ponty provided an explanation for my experience of engulfment by a world of feeling. He steadied me in the face of my daughter’s illness by enabling me to dare to see that even this terrible revelation is a treasured gift. In the light of this part of the journey I can see that there is indeed a circularity to the relationship between existence and concept, but I can also believe that it is not a symmetrical relationship; that existence comes first as an ambiguous felt ground for my conceptualisation of being in the world. Into this ground the ideas of Merleau-Ponty and other phenomenologists *leak*. It seems to me like an infiltration; like *preparation for thinking and acting* differently. I seem to take on the feel of the thinking man as if I was donning his clothes, and trying out his way of being. Through this slow leakage there is a change in practice, but it lags behind; in this way the changes to my ground both lead, in the sense of opening out possibility, and also consolidate, in the sense of filling in to support new configurations of meaningful practice.

## CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusions and new questions

### Introduction - The questions for this chapter

This is the last chapter of the thesis. I will use the chapter to draw conclusions and suggest new questions for the future. As I reflect on the meaning I am taking from the doctoral journey I will direct my attention towards three aspects of the doctoral journey.

The first aspect concerns the questions with which I started this thesis about my own existence. How has my process of first person action research helped me to locate exciting questions, and to re-visit sources of life energy? What have I learned about finding vitality and change in my fifties? As I engage with these questions, my first person research process helps me to continue to ground my response in a fuller understanding of my current life world. As I look more deeply at my life world in this chapter, I come to understand that being more clearly who I am is itself a source of energy and excitement, and also provides firmer ground from which to change. A richer engagement with my own ground proves to be energetic. This energy comes in part from understanding more clearly new opportunities, or possibilities; but also from realising that some things in my present may need to be engaged with more fully. In other words, the answer to my questions about energy and excitement may not necessarily lie in movement into new things, but also in a more heart felt steadiness in the present. The metaphor that comes to mind in this respect is that of a farmer tilling his soil so it might enrich the life that nature will bring. I think that by documenting my life world over the years from 2001-2006 and then returning to that ground now in this thesis (July 2006 –March 2007) I have been tilling the soil of my life, and preparing it for richer growth. It has felt like vital ongoing preparation. In this chapter I take this thought forward.

The second aspect of the doctoral journey to be addressed here concerns what I have learned about inquiry, especially as it relates to experience and knowledge. How might we inquire into the experiential realm? How might the theoretical speculations with which chapter four ended be applied in practice? In responding to these questions I introduce two further developments in my consulting practice that also reverberate into my private life. One is concerned with training I undertook in 2005 into a process for working systemically with families and organisations called *Constellating*, and the other is an event that occurred in a consulting case with a multi national corporation. Engaging in the practical realities of training and consulting reciprocates with the intellectual re-framing I described in the last chapter to clarify the nature of my inquiry journey. As a result of this interaction between practice and theory I identify two broad dimensions to my inquiry. I use these dimensions as loosely held focusing, and inquiring devices, rather than seeking to assert them as tightly defined conclusions from the thesis. Through their use, I seek to gather sense together, without over determining meaning. The two dimensions are related to the question, how do I participate in the world?

- The first dimension concerns participation through belonging. This concerns the importance of place. I examine how I am *intimately located*, and what this might mean for action research. I ask, how do I belong?
- The second dimension concerns attentional discipline and examines the idea that we participate in the world by wandering, or roaming, in a particular way. I remind myself (and other inquirers) of the value of staying close to the point where sense begins the process of determination. I ask how do we trace the emergence of things to us?

My third set of questions concerns this process of doctoral journeying: what has been my experience of being an inquirer? How has it been to engage with writing as a process of first person action research? What have I learned about my own style as a researcher? This enables me to consider the way writing has opened up my life world for inquiry, and to also consider how the work of writing has sharpened my attentional discipline, and revealed what has been present, but invisible, in my life.

In terms of the overall doctoral journey this chapter covers the last phase from the time of transfer from MPhil to PhD in February 2005 until I began to write this thesis in a café atop mount Floyen, overlooking the city of Bergen on July 9<sup>th</sup> 2006.

The chapter is divided into four sections:

Section One, *A rhythm of distance and closeness*, describes how my engagement with Constellations, through training and practice (including constellating aspects of my own family dynamic), highlights desire for a fruitful balance between proximity and distance as a source of energy for me.

Section Two, *The dead men in the pipe*, draws on a consulting case from late 2005 to deepen my questions of myself in the territory of truth. I ask myself do I stand in my own truth?

Section Three, *Resolution: participation, experience and knowing*, makes use of Merleau-Ponty's thought to inform an inquiry into how I participate in the world. The section concludes with a map of significant themes emerging from the doctoral inquiry.

Section Four, *Resolution: re-capping, fresh questions and new directions*, uses a recap of important aspects of the doctoral journey to inquire into the new questions that emerge, and the new directions that suggest themselves. What will I now attend to?

### 5.1. A rhythm of distance and closeness.

This section explores my desire to find a generative balance between closeness and distance in respect of myself, and 'other'. I propose that this "desire: has been present throughout the thesis, becoming progressively more explicit as the journey of writing the thesis has unfolded. This section serves the thesis by continuing to explicate this 'desire' into a theme, relating to my fundamental questions concerning energy and excitement.

The occasion for clarifying the significance of my search for balance in this regard is my involvement, during 2005, with a process for inquiring into systemic themes within families and organisations called *Constellating*. In this section I first describe the constellating process, and what it meant for me to engage with it in 2005. Then I examine more closely my personal involvement, as I became a subject of constellating processes. Finally, I show how the question of balancing distance and closeness emerges from the reciprocation between my experience and my thinking.

*Why is my engagement with Constellating important for the thesis?*

In the following paragraphs I describe how I came to know the Constellating process. I do this primarily by re-visiting a description I provided in January 2005 in a paper called *Body and Process*, which I included as part of my papers for transferring from MPhil to PhD. This description was based on my preliminary engagement with the Constellating process as I described it in Chapter Four in relation to the 'W' case. I had attended two Constellating workshops during weekends in October and November 2004, and had used this training to influence the design I developed for the 'W' case (1st December 2004). Over this period in the autumn of 2004 and early 2005 I was supplementing my experience with reading, and with writing. The writing for my transfer in January 2005 was part of a process of enriching and securing my understanding of the constellating process, and its implications for me professionally and personally.

The close proximity between the Constellating weekends, the W case and then writing the transfer paper, *Body and Process* is significant. What I wrote was from the perspective of having not only experienced the Constellating process, but also having tried to assimilate my understanding into practical use in a consulting assignment. In consequence, although ostensibly the writing was about Constellating it also discloses something about my consulting priorities at the time. I think that the writing also takes on richness because it comes at a time when I was deeply engaged with absorbing phenomenological concepts, and re-working my Gestalt understanding. In this sense what follows *is* a report of what I was taking from my engagement with Constellations at that time in January 2005, *and* it also discloses an emerging manifesto for my own consulting, *and* an insight into how phenomenology and re-worked Gestalt were beginning to leak into my ways of thinking about practice.

These overlapping possibilities in my writing are influenced by the specific purpose that I brought to gaining a fuller understanding of Constellating. My attention to Constellations had a particular focus on the *process* of working. I had no intention of becoming a family therapist, which is the purpose for which the method was first developed. My questions, as I became engaged with Constellations, were about what I might take to integrate into my own consulting practice. In one sense this repeats a pattern, because ten years earlier in 1993-1994 I had attended a Gestalt training programme with Sonia Nevis on couples and family therapy. My experience was that creative thinking about how to interact with groups as complex as families, had potential learning for working systemically in organisations: as I got to know Sonia Nevis after the training programme, I became used to the idea that there could be a helpful transfer of knowledge between working with families and working with organisations. As I looked towards Constellations for inspiration I was repeating this pattern.

My focus on the *process* of Constellating also involved me in ignoring other aspects of Constellating that I found less savoury: the practice is based on some very normative assumptions about what is right or wrong in families, which are called the “Orders”. An example is the rule that those who were in the system first have priority (Franke, 2003: 93); another is a focus on finding and knowing one’s place (Beaumont, 1999: 15). This “ordering” has implications of a normative and conservative nature. This is a specific manifestation of a general theme in family therapy, which is towards the holding forces of family groups<sup>74</sup>. I mention this here because this style of engaging with the process and ignoring some of the substantive, political and social implications of the process, also repeats a pattern. It is a pattern that will be important for me as I ask later in this chapter, what do I stand for? Is my process consultant’s focus on *how* things are achieved at the cost of *what* it is that is being done, and does this effectively block a source of energy and excitement for me?

The focus that Constellating brings to the holding or conservative forces within families, also highlights, and reinforces for me, a theme that I discern in Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, and in my interest in the ground in the Gestalt figure/ground. As such the stance I take towards Constellating is both a consequence of the re-thinking I described in Chapter Four and a reinforcement of it. The overall effect is to emphasise a growing interest in belonging, and being in place: my experience of constellating helps me to identify this as a point of specific interest in my re-thinking of how I am situated in the world. As I will explain in this chapter my attention to the

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<sup>74</sup> “All relationship systems are conservative. Their logic demands that the member’s shared investment of care and concern should serve to balance out all injustices and exploitations. Through both the unchanged-ability of genetic relatedness and the continuity of obligation accounts, families constitute the most conservative systems of all relationships” (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark, 1973:11).

belonging/being in place aspect of Constellating proves to be focusing on only one half of what is being revealed. As my experience of Constellating develops during 2005, I achieve a fuller understanding of how the 'being in place' aspects exist in counterpoint to a commitment to paying attention to experience in the present moment; and to the potentially liberating consequences of such attentional discipline. In this sense, the movement of my understanding in relation to Constellating, mirrors the movement of a wider understanding that is thematic for the thesis.

*How did I understand Constellating in early 2005?*

Constellating is a process for representing the complex dynamics of family situations through placing people in physical relationship to each other. It looks like a form of psychodrama (Franke, 2003:47) except the processes of movement are more stylised, and there is very little speaking. It is normal for the family situation brought to be considered within the Constellation to be a trans-generational one. The constellating process is concerned with historic patterns and entanglements, often involving the representation of people who are deceased. In this sense the work of Constellating builds on the work of family therapist Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy<sup>75</sup> and his collaborators (1973; 1986), who drew attention to the way families re-created patterns of entanglement across generations.

I want now to quote four paragraphs from my 2005 paper to illustrate how I was making sense of the Constellating process at this time. Let us read the extract first. Then I will offer some observations that will tie this account into the preliminary remarks I have offered at the beginning of this section.

What you see when constellating takes place is typically a space encircled by interested participants. This space forms a kind of stage on which some of the participants model a human system by representing parts of that system in relationship with each other. As well as being a physical, practical space it also takes on the qualities of a special experimental space in which slightly different rules of engagement with other people prevail. Here in this space those who bring issues or represent parts of systems being modelled are encouraged to make figural their embodied feeling and sensing states, and to hold back their cognitive intellectual functions.

The constellating process starts with someone bringing an issue to do with a system that is typically not represented in the room [i.e. only the issue holder from that system is present]: this might be the issue holder's family of origin or a department in an organisation, but in any case the constellating will not normally be done with those who are themselves members of the system to be modelled – even the issue holder is

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<sup>75</sup> Iván Böszörményi-Nagy (born Budapest, May 19, 1920; died Glenside, Pennsylvania, January 28, 2007) was a Hungarian-American psychiatrist. He emigrated from Hungary to the United States in 1950. He developed the contextual approach to family therapy, which emphasizes the ethical dimension of family development. ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iván\\_Böszörményi-Nagy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iván_Böszörményi-Nagy).)

represented by another person. It needs to be emphasised that the representatives usually have no previous knowledge of the system being modelled. The issue holder is usually encouraged to say only a little about the problem he or she has with the system. The information the issue holder supplies is mainly embodied in the way in which they make an initial placement of the representatives; the angles and distances that relate the various components of the system. These representatives typically stay still until moved by the facilitator, acting on information supplied in response to questions s/he asks of the representatives, and in an attempt to find a place that feels better for the representative. In this way the constellating process seeks out knowledge, which is contained in the configuration of the system, and which is unlocked by relative strangers through their bodily responses to that system as it is modelled.

The constellation looks like a highly stylised form of drama, where the movement takes place in a very considered and measured, way normally under the direction of the facilitator. Each movement is considered for its total systemic effect. It is not unusual for the facilitator, having been told by a representative that they want to move, to ask them to move one third of the movement they want to make, and then to check with the other representatives, "what has changed for you?" or "Is this better, worse, or the same?"

The representatives are briefed to report changes in bodily state such as feeling cold down one side, or weak or strong, or changes in perception, such as the room looking brighter, or distances feeling further or shorter. [I then quote from advice provided to those who take on the role of representatives in a Constellation].

"If you are a representative, it's really important to say what you are experiencing. Try to bracket out your beliefs and your preferences. You don't need to forget them. It's enough to pay attention to what is actually going on in your body, and in your heart and in your soul while you are representing someone in a constellation. In some families, you may feel something that is taboo or forbidden, a sexual charge, a murderous rage, or you may begin to weep. It is important that you give us that information, but we ask you not to offer your theories about the family. That's information that is not helpful for this kind of work." (Hellinger and Beaumont, 1999: 15). (Transfer Papers 4<sup>th</sup> February 2005)

Taken as a whole this piece of writing supports the view that in early 2005 I was most interested and engaged with the *structural aspects* of the Constellation process. In this piece of writing I place emphasis on: a) the structuring of space; b) the slow and measured pace of the process, and the way this reveals the interlinked nature of the whole system (e.g. by careful exploration of the potential for consequential impact arising from small movements by one person); and c) the abstract qualities of the performance, which can be seen through phrases such as "stylised drama", and "angles and distances that relate the various components of the system". I do also mention the way the Constellation focuses attention on bodily experience; however these references are all related to the experience of the participants.



This is particularly evident in the quotation from Hellinger and Beaumont that I include at the end of this piece. There is no mention of the experience of the Constellator/facilitator. From the perspective of this account the Constellator is playing the role of a sensitive stage director. I am underplaying, through omission, the part they are playing. In a sense this bias recreates the design I produced for the W case, where I set up an intervention, and then withdrew to observe. This also had resonance with the approach I had taken in my supervision group as reported in Chapter Three.

Re visiting this description of the Constellating case shows me something in my process during the doctoral journey that was not apparent to me at the time in 2005. I believe now that the description, when read in the context of my intervention in the W, case shows me seeking the generative aspects of an established aspect of my consulting style. It shows me detaching from the client situation, so as to create useful space for the client, and to lessen the opportunity for my own egocentricity to become enmeshed unhelpfully in the client's situation. In my writing and my practice from this time I am recognising, and illuminating, aspects of my own capability and practice: configuring them in a positive light. In writing about them, directly and indirectly (the 'W' case and my description/understanding of Constellating), I perceive the world of my consulting more clearly from the perspective of a skilful facilitator of others. The description from 2005 brings this aspect of my self more clearly to light. I see myself as identifying a resource in myself that I might set alongside my introspection and self-absorption. This is a resource that is being seen differently as I engage with the existential aspects of phenomenology and this particular practice of working with families. I myself am seeking an antidote to the neediness and self-indulgence that seemed to come so strongly to the fore in 2002/3, and *I am doing this by looking to what is already present as a capacity of myself*. I take to constellating in part because I am already a Constellator: arguably this is what I was doing in the strategy case in 2001. As I recognise myself in the constellating process so I come to understand that in my search for energy and excitement I may not need to look for what is brand new: I may need to look closer to hand at what I am already skilful at<sup>76</sup>. Does my competence have another side? Is my competence blocking my energy?

The sense I make of this now as I look back on the stream of activity, and its associated writing from early 2005, is that the course I was exploring had a double edge. I understand now more clearly, that heading in the direction of

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<sup>76</sup> Argyris identified the potential for professionals to defeat their own learning efforts by clinging to competence, and avoiding the potential embarrassment of making themselves vulnerable, by publicly recognising error (Argyris, Putnam and Smith, 1985: 280-281; Argyris, 1992: 27-34; Argyris and Schon, 1996: 75-78). Although there are aspects of public disconfirmation involved in my journey, my focus is more on a more private journey. I seek to re-shape the fundamentals of my own reasoning process through my engagement with Merleau-Ponty, and to discover unacknowledged resources within my own ground.

a more detached stance towards my clients opened up another aspect of myself, which is deeply connected to the theme of energy and excitement in my life. This side is symbolised by the feedback from B, and my reaction to it as I re-read it as part of writing this thesis. I see that the “selflessness” of my response to my clients also contains a worm in its heart. This is the “worm” of detachment and its personal consequences for me – and my clients. What is exposed is my capacity for “disappearance”. Bridget spoke of how painful this had been for her, and others, who have given me feedback, have noticed how it affected the energy and quality of contact between myself and other people. This awareness of myself as potentially ‘disappearing’ deepens my feeling for the complexity of my situation. On the one hand I see myself moving from self absorption towards a more detached focus on systemic relations. As I do I begin to notice that my apparent selflessness connects to a less generative aspect of my style – my capacity to ‘disappear.’

*A perspective from the action research literature helps me*

The dilemma I am framing for myself is an intensely personal one. However, it is also one that is articulated at another level within the qualitative inquiry literature. Engaging at this level helps to flesh out the nature of the dilemma, and put it in a larger context. Here is one way of expressing the double-sided nature of the choices facing action researchers that resonates with my own dilemma.

If classic ethnography’s vice was the slippage from the ideal of detachment to actual indifference, that of present day reflexivity is the tendency for the self-absorbed Self to lose sight altogether of the culturally different Other (Fine, Weis, Weseen and Wong, 2000: 109).

Here we have a presentation of generative and de-generative aspects of the same qualities: detachment may become indifference; reflexivity may become self-absorption. On the one hand the authors notice that when relatively privileged researchers are inquiring into the lives of those who have been marginalised, then high levels of self-reflexivity by the researcher may silence the research “subject”. The research becomes for the researcher and their own development, not for the client. They also graphically illustrate that a lack of reflexivity may be problematic by quoting Ruth Behar:

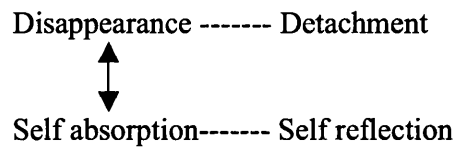
We ask for revelations from others, but we reveal little or nothing of ourselves; we make others vulnerable, but we ourselves remain invulnerable (ibid)<sup>77</sup>

This presentation helps me to see more of the potential complexity in my own situation. Encouraged by this article I ask myself whether my self-reflection can dip into self-absorption; and whether healthy detachment can

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<sup>77</sup> Behar, R. (1993). *Translated woman: Crossing the border with Esperanza’s story*. Boston: Beacon.

dip into disappearance? Also whether the degenerative aspects of both these dimensions might not reinforce each other.



The reference above to vulnerability also raises the question about whether I am being defensive (Argyris and Schon, 1996: 75). The reference to “vulnerability” is particularly pertinent as I spend much of my time working with organisational leaders, where being open to learning, despite the ramifications of power, is vital to the social utility, and sheer effectiveness of the organisations in which they lead (Torbert, 1998: 235-239). Does a design like that created for W show me being vulnerable? Or is it being competent and powerful? I think here of a question I asked myself at the EGOS conference (July, 2006) to which I will refer again in this chapter: “am I just being clever and powerful?” Also from the perspective of early 2005 I can see my detachment as a tendency to not participate with my clients in the work. It is not so much a case that I am doing research “on them” (Heron and Reason, 2001: 179), but that I am not joining them in a shared enterprise. I am detached rather than exploitative. Within the action research literature I might say that this relates, in part, to qualities in the second person aspects of my work. My inquiry *with* the client is muted.

This discussion of the ethical issues relating to how the action researcher positions them self in relation to the client system, helps me to clarify my own question in two ways. First it opens me to the potential subtlety of the issue at hand in respect of myself. It reinforces and clarifies my intuition that my skilfulness might, in some way, be working against me. How does my competence have another side? How is my competence undermining me in my search for my life energy? This line of questioning takes me towards re-framing the questions I am asking of my self, as I will show shortly. The other line of questioning opened by Fine, and colleagues, relates directly to how I participate, and in particular how I bring myself into the inquiry situation with my clients. An important aspect of this concerns the question, what is a healthy and energetic way to bring my own subjectivity to bear in my consulting, and more generally in my life? My inquiry into this question about the use of my own subjectivity is subsequently shaped by a change in my experience of the constellating process, as I transition from being a trainee seeking new methods and technique into becoming a direct participant. Through my participation I come to understand my own dilemma more clearly, and also to see the skills of the Constellator differently. In consequence of this change of perspective I not only see something different in the Constellators skills but also recognise resources in myself that might support me towards a healthier engagement with myself and others.

*I experience a constellation as an issue holder*

In the following paragraphs I describe how my experience of directly participating in a Constellation reveals how intensely personal they are and illustrates the necessary competence of the Constellator in bringing attentional discipline to bear. I see how the constellation is both structural *and* personal. This awareness contributes to my reflection on my own circumstances by opening the possibility that I might draw on my own capabilities for paying attention to help plot a more generative path for myself.

During the second half of 2005, an important aspect of my inquiry was that I engaged twice in a constellation as an issue holder. Both situations being constellated involved my family: one was exploring my relationship with my sons, and the other with my parents. Reporting on these involves some difficult issues, because I have been cautious about providing a full explanation of these Constellations publicly. I have also been cautious about sharing the full story of the Constellations with my sons or my parents partly from a desire to not impose on them material which, while it may be important to me, may be less so to them. I have shared parts of what came up with parents and sons respectively, but not the detail. I would like here to speak about the case as they relate to my ongoing inquiry without producing the case studies.

The picture that emerged from both constellations was one of a stuck male energy within the male line of our family. The root of this was the death of my grandfather in an accident when my father was seventeen. My father had gone to war shortly afterwards, and had stayed away from home for seven years. Many of his friends were also killed in the war. Both Constellations pointed back to my father's premature loss of his own father as a blocking force in the trans-generational relationship patterns among the men in our family. The Constellation revealed the possibility that my father's loss was still operating in our family in some way, and I resolved to speak with my father about this. The Constellation also opened up in me intense feelings for my father, which were stronger than those I was aware of in my contact with the real man. I realised how much I loved him, and also how stuck that love had become. The resolution in the Constellation did not offer much optimism for radically changing this situation in the time my father and I had left. However I did take from it some clues as to future lines of inquiry: a) I have made a determined effort to re-caste my relationship with my father while taking care to respect the extent to which he does and does not want to be involved in such an enterprise. I'm motivated in this partly by the insight provided by the Constellations that this will have a benefit on my relationship with my own sons; b) the experience led me to inquire into the attitude and skills of the Constellator which has consequences for how I re-connect to my own capacities as a human being.

I'm deciding not to offer a lot of detail about my inquiries with sons and father but I do want to mention some of this in order to emphasise the personal nature of this systemic inquiry. This serves the overall thesis by

filling out important aspects of the intimate way in which I am situated, both as a person and as an action researcher. In this sense the account I now offer fleshes out the question, what does it mean to be situated in a historic context?

About ten days after the Constellation concerning my relationship with my mother and father (which occurred on the 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2005) I went down to visit them at their home in Devon with Bridget, armed with a tape recorder. I asked my parents if I could record the occasion of their meeting as a piece of family history. I said that eventually I might have it transcribed for others in the family (I have not done so yet). I wanted to make it seem like a piece of family research (They knew that I had been compiling a family tree) to position it in a relaxed way, but also to keep a focus. I hoped that the tape recorder would keep us on subject. In the event they talked with real enthusiasm for just over two hours. Bridget and I took them to a pub nearby that had a quiet restaurant. I asked them first to explain how they met, got married and spent their early life. This was amusing because they had different stories. They laughed and disagreed. I had never heard this detail before. When later I spoke with Bridget she said that she had never spoken with her parents about these private aspects of their life. Since then I have discovered that many of my colleagues have never talked in this personal way with their parents. Then I asked about my grandfather.

I knew some of the story. He had been gassed in 1916, and subsequently had difficulty working full time, because his lungs had been damaged by chlorine in the gas. Partly as a result of this my father's family were not well off. I also knew that my grandfather was killed in 1940 in a road accident during the 'blackout' when he was knocked off his bike by a bus. This much I knew but now my father told me much more. I learned that at the time he had been waiting for my grandfather in a nearby church where they were both choristers, and other more private details. This part of the conversation was held quietly, but without visible emotion. It was un-dramatic but serious. My mother knew the story, but she listened intently. In fact that was the atmosphere of the moment – intense listening. After this my mother insisted on telling lots of detail I really didn't want to hear, about what a difficult birth I had been, which caused amusement for my wife and father. We went home, and Bridget and I stayed the night before heading home. We spoke about them as we drove. The life they had led, and what we might have to do as they got older. We decided to let our sons know in outline the story of their great grandfather. The story has entered our family life. Not with great drama, but just quietly as one of the things that gets mentioned from time to time. When I see my parents I look for an opportunity to mention him.

Later that year I took my youngest son back to Nottingham to visit my father's sister and we stayed in a hotel directly opposite St Mary's church where my father had waited for his father all those years before. We visited the church and I told my son about my father and his father. About the death and a little about what I thought it might have been like to lose a father like

that at such an age. It was not a long conversation but it felt as though my relationship with Joe was being reinforced a little just by bringing Arthur's name into a realm where we might speak about it. April 17<sup>th</sup> 2007 was my parents sixtieth wedding anniversary. As the oldest son I made a toast. I referred to Arthur and my other grandparents, bringing them into the room by saying that, if they were here, how proud they would be of my parents' achievement in their life. I felt my own presence as a son, and also as a father, as I spoke. It felt right. Now in our family something long gone is now spoken of, and this has changed the situation for me (and I fancy for others). I feel more like I 'represent' something, and that in this way my life as father, and also as son, has been enhanced.

Since the Constellation I have become more attuned to how paying attention to quite small moments of contact within the family can be a source of joy and connectedness for me. These are often not dramatic moments of high emotion; rather they are 'ordinary' in the sense of being about the normal practicalities of being a family. However, through them I feel more grounded in my life within my family – as if something had been restored to me. I am not so very different in other ways. Still showing a capacity for detachment, but somehow this seems to have been transcended. Ordinary life has many moving moments once it is attended to, and I don't need to be a process consultant to get joy from them. Here is an example of a family event concerning Alice, which I recorded in my notebook in early 2006. I like it because it still shows me slightly on the edge of things, but in a healthier way. I take heart from this so I want to show it to you.

*Haircutting Ceremony*

In Alice's room [in the Churchill Hospital in Oxford] this afternoon. I visited her with Joe. She already had a visitor – Sarah – a buddy from diving... Alice proposed we should help her cut her hair which was starting to fall out- this was upsetting her. She wanted to take control of the process. We gathered around her bed. First Sarah started to cut with scissors. Then Joe took up an electronic shaver he had brought with him [he and Alice must have pre-arranged this but I knew nothing about it], and he shaved her scalp. As her hair dropped to the ground a new face appeared. The eyes and the smile seemed much more pronounced without the softening frame of the hair. I could cradle it [her head] easily in my hands as I bent over to kiss the top of her head. There was laughing and joking about the wearing of hats. Alice thought we all needed to buy her silk scarves. I will buy her some tomorrow [over the next few months I did especially when at airports]. It was moving for me to see Joe carefully shave his sisters head; to see the natural familiarity with which they moved together...Alice dropping her chin to expose the naked curve where the head shapes into the back of the neck. Joe, holding her head, and moving the clippers gently over the scalp. To be with her like this.(Notebook, 13<sup>th</sup> January 2006, vol. 8: 221-222)

These moments of gentle conversation, physical proximity and contact were moving for me. I felt re awakened to all of my children through the experience. Finding small things to do together, and creating new

opportunities for interaction between friends and family has become a tradition of Alice's chemotherapy.

This event had another consequence. I told a friend about the haircutting ceremony, and he contacted another three friends, who suggested to me that we form a men's group to provide me with support through this time of illness in my family. We met in February, 2006, and have met at approximately three monthly intervals since then. The group has never just been about supporting me, although my circumstances have provided some start up energy. We talk about our lives as men, especially about our children, and our relationships (Two, including myself are married, one is gay and the other is divorced and in a long term relationship). When we met near Aberdeen in Scotland in September 2006 we spent the weekend working around a story that had been brought by one of our number. We cooked meals together went on walks and talked about our lives. I have been impressed by this restoration of simple friendship, and I have begun to think about the value of friendship and conversation as a key social capacity in organisations. As a consequence of the meetings with my friends, and the simple events with Alice, some very familiar things have begun to appear differently to me. For example when I went to Stavanger to meet a long standing coaching client in June 2006 I accepted an invitation to visit her in her home and meet her husband and all her children. Before I would have felt this was crossing self imposed boundary against too much intimacy. It was revealing to experience the broader context of her life and to talk with her husband and children. These are simple things but they are invested with energy for me; I feel this 'energy' as a stirring and significant re investment in what is human. Is this what it is to be situated? To belong?

#### *Re-visiting the Constellators.*

In these paragraphs I want to return to what I learned about the role the Constellators were playing in the Constellation process. This leads me to clarify my understanding of the balance between detachment and engagement by seeing the way that the Constellators seek to use themselves in service of the client. Through this I come to a fuller understanding of what it might mean to use my subjectivity healthily, and also to recognise that some aspects of what I see resonate with aspects of my own training. Have I forgotten? Is there more in my ground that might be remembered? How much is development in my fifties a question of remembering what has been forgotten?

My experience of having my own family issues Constellated caused me to attend differently to the Constellating process. I was moved in two directions. One direction was to get more interested in what the Constellators were saying concerning what they were trying to do in a Constellation: how were they seeking to use themselves? The second direction was to seek to integrate insights from this inquiry into my own practice. To some extent this involved me in discovering things that seemed familiar as if I was re-organising what I knew as well as taking on board new things. I want next to say something about what happened as I began to

read about the Constellators and to think about their practice in relation to my own learning about phenomenology and Gestalt.

As I looked to the literature I discover that the Constellators were deeply interested in their own phenomenological experience. Bert Hellinger is one of the founders of the Constellation process. Here is what he says about the stance he is seeking to take.

Phenomenology is a philosophical method. For me it means subjecting myself to larger contexts and connections, without needing to understand them. I accept them without any intention of helping or proving anything. I submit without fear of what might arise, and the horrifying things that do come out don't frighten me. I face everything, exactly the way it is. In a constellation, I look at everyone, including those who aren't present. I keep them all in view, and then, exposed to this picture, I get a flash of what lies behind the phenomenon....Something takes form that is an essential factor in the behaviour of the people in the family. This essential quality may not be visible, but it's illuminated through the observation of the phenomenon. It comes out into the open, into the light. That's a phenomenological approach. (Hellinger, 1999: 22)

Hellinger is here advocating a two-pronged practice strategy that, as he says, is fundamentally phenomenological. The first step is immersion in the object of his intention – in this case the broader systemic connections of the family system he is in the presence of. He speaks of “submitting” himself and of how he aims to “submit without fear” and of “facing everything exactly the way it is”. He is trying to comprehend the whole system so he says that he looks at “everyone, including those who aren't present”: in other words he wants to take in as much of what is present as possible. He is deeply attentive. Intertwined with this is the second element of his practice strategy, which is to put aside any “intention of helping or proving anything”. These twin prongs are directly comparable to an important aspect of Ladkin's illumination of phenomenology for action researchers (2005: 108-126)<sup>78</sup>. Ladkin identifies two inter related aspects of phenomenological experience which can “help action researchers take a full account of their subjectivity while simultaneously seeking to more fully understand the other as they engage in inquiry processes.”

Drawing in particular on Husserl and Heidegger Ladkin directly connects phenomenological method with the familiar (to action researchers) concept of critical subjectivity. In service of this connection she suggests that an inquirer seek to adopt “critical subjectivity by noticing how our own consciousness contributes to what we perceive and seeking to suspend our beliefs etc through a process of “bracketing” (ibid: 119). This is what Hellinger is seeking to emphasise when he too speaks of putting aside any

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<sup>78</sup> Ladkin asks how can I, “*while holding on to my subjectivity*, also put it aside, so that I can be open to the other in a way that enables the other to reveal something of itself to me?” (ibid: 113. Emphasis added)



intention to prove anything or even to help. In other words to even put aside that which is probably most personally pressing – how can I help this family? The second limb of Ladkin's strategy is immersion in the object towards which her consciousness is directed. Drawing on "Goethian method" she suggests that the "perceiver puts all of his or her attention into active seeing by plunging into the qualities of the things being observed" (ibid: 120). The idea of immersion is also consistent with Hellinger's focus on taking in as much of the family system as immediately and directly as possible. This limb of the strategy Ladkin suggests will directly reinforce the first limb, as the perceiver's pre conceptions fade under the intensity created by the deliberate direct encounter (ibid: 121)<sup>79</sup>.

Hellinger, in his account of his practice, goes on to highlight an essential tension in this stance. On the one hand to, "look at this person with love and without judgement, and wait until he or she was illuminated" so that the observed person is "changed before our very eyes" (Hellinger, 1999: 23). On the other to ensure that there is, "a certain distance. If you jump in – and many helpers jump in-you can't maintain awareness"(ibid). This is a kind of immersion that is committed to the reception of the other – it is a highly open stance that is being advocated here. Both Hellinger and Ladkin are cautioning against premature action when we are almost bound to move from a particular stance such as – in the case of a therapist - being a helper. Ladkin adds the thought that this difficult process of giving something very full attention while simultaneously holding one self back in terms of one's own desires wishes etc., might be experienced as a process of slowing down:

What these phenomenological methods are trying to provide, perhaps, is a means by which this interaction can be slowed down and consciously attended to. In doing so, aspects of the other (or even of ourselves and our patterns of perception) which are habitually ignored can reveal themselves, leading to the possibility of a fuller knowing or truth arising between us (Ladkin, 2005: 120)

This is reminiscent of the description of "sensual abstraction" introduced in Chapter Four. Stewart used a slightly different metaphor when she writes, not of slowing down, but of trying to "cull attention to moments of legibility and emergence" (Stewart: 1027). She seeks to pay attention to the moments

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<sup>79</sup> My Gestalt heritage also lays an emphasis on the energetic aspects of being alert to our own subjective experiencing of things:

"It is all too easy to depart from the flow of immediate sensuous reality and disappear into thoughts images, rehearsings, worries, fragments of memory – that ongoing mixture of free association and conversation with self, conducted at a sub vocal (or sub-sub-sub-vocal) level, which has the capacity to fill minds interminably. We can remain in this realm of consciousness (or rather semi-consciousness) for long periods – witness those times when we have driven long distances along familiar routes and have only woken up when we arrived. 'How did I get here? we ask' (Parlett, 2001: 44).

when things emerge into sense. Merleau-Ponty would refer to these as moments of dehiscence, encouraging a comparison between the emergence of sense, and the breaking open of a seedpod. Through these metaphors these scholars all convey the potential benefits of developing disciplines of attention, and the double-sided nature of this attention: illuminating the self and the other.

In this thesis I have sought to use the written form to describe how things have emerged to me. This has involved me in seeking to describe both what is happening to me, and to also open myself to “other” so that I might illuminate “other” through description as well. In this sense the thesis follows an intuition of the doctoral journey where I sought to describe my situation before I really understood the significance of what I was doing. Sonia Nevis advised me to “say where I am” and I have tried to turn this into a methodological principle. As I have struggled with this I have slipped both ways at various times in the doctoral journey. I have over focused on myself and slipped into self-indulgence particularly in 2002/03. I have also slipped the other way as I have become remote and detached. Now I am being shown a practice that seeks to sustain an illuminating balance – for that is what it is. What these phenomenologists in practice clarify is that by opening myself to other so I will also illuminate myself. I cannot get to a closer understanding of myself by introspection alone, and I cannot get there by removing or hiding myself. It is only from my engagement with the ‘other’ that I will also come to see my self more clearly; also this is the only means to discover what is exciting and novel for me at this time in my life, for it is only in relations to something other than me that energy arises. This is what my phenomenological journey seems to be revealing to me as the healthy relationship with my subjectivity. How though did I start to practice this insight as I gradually acquired it during 2005? What follows is an account of a Consulting case from the autumn of 2005 in which I sought to apply my revised perspective on the use of my own subjective self. As I do so I make another discovery that relates phenomenological method directly to my interest in energy, and excitement in my life.

## 5.2. The dead men in the pipe

This section illustrates me making use of my own subjectivity in a consulting case from the autumn of 2005. From the perspective of this thesis the case is double edged. On the one hand it *does* demonstrates me engaging more fully in the moment of an important exchange in a meeting with a corporate client. However the case also illustrates how, in a later account of this situation at an international conference, I deny myself; I stand back from the full truth of what I was trying to do in the moment of my exchange in the corporate office. This is another form of the “cleverness” to which I have alluded before, and it causes me to think through the consequences of behaving in such a way as to “deny myself”. Using my newly found understanding of what truth might mean from a phenomenological perspective I ask, do I stand in my own truth? In responding to the question I realise that having the courage to be simply truthful requires being alert to the way my own desire to appear competent and clever might sabotage me. Do I beguile myself away from my truth? Have I enchanted myself in some way?

This case occurs on September 20<sup>th</sup> at the same time as I was deepening my understanding of Constellations to include the way in which the Constellators were making use of their own subjective experience to support their clients. In describing the case I will draw on the text of an article I have prepared for the Gestalt Journal. I intend this case to provide a contrast with the more disembodied, and remote story, recounted in the W case.

The issue that led directly to my presence in the UK office of a large multi national in September 2005 was one of safety: four men had died inside a 54” diameter stainless steel pipe in gas processing plant being built in Egypt. The four men had all been asphyxiated by Argon gas used in the welding operation to prevent oxidation of the steel The official report records the bare bones of the event.

*Between 1430 and 1440, a grinding technician and a welder made an unauthorized entry (no Confined space Entry Permit was requested nor issued) into the pipe. It is believed they entered the pipe to perform a seal weld on the interior side of the weld.....Shortly thereafter, the grinder died inside the pipe as he descended the slope at the end of the pipe. The welder exited the pipe and raised the alarm. Upon hearing the alarm the pipe fitter, a grinder and others entered the pipe in a rescue attempt. Attempts to stop workers entering the pipe were made by a manager and a supervisor at the scene, but rescuers forced their way into the pipe. Three would be rescuers died inside the pipe..... ”*  
(Confidential Company Report quoted with approval on the basis that the name of the Company is withheld)

I had been invited to the meeting because the Company was interested in inquiring into cultural features that might be contributing to unsafe working

practices within their own and contractor operations.<sup>80</sup> I was sitting silently absorbing as much as I could, trying to figure out how might I contribute.

As I listened I noticed my own shocked response to the story. I remember imagining briefly the turmoil of thought and feeling that must have gripped the men in the pipe and the feelings of pity and anger that arose in me. I was aware that I was controlling my feeling, looking for signs that the men in the room felt some compassion for those who had died so I could remain balanced. As I listened it seemed clear that those present were indeed highly concerned; however, the conversation was a little like the report quoted above: on the whole it was dispassionate and impersonal (no names for example), which was not how I was feeling. What sense could I make of the contrast between what seemed to me to be a disembodied dialogue and my own disturbed feelings? There were clear risks here that if I spoke I might sound self-righteous or indignant, which would be likely to lose my audience. What I did was to wait while I tried to distance myself from my feeling state, or, in that telling phrase, to collect myself. As I did so I noticed something slightly different: in their concern to take action to prevent repetition of this accident, there was an inclination to present the men who died in the attempted rescue as being at fault. They were in breach of procedure, had ignored their supervisor etc. It occurred to me that there might be some value at this early stage in the process of retaining a fuller sense of the incident so I offered these thoughts: "I wonder if we should also notice that these men seem also to have acted selflessly and courageously in caring for their fellow worker? Has this been recognised and honoured? It also seems to me that without people caring for each other then we will find it hard to have the kind of safe environment you desire. Perhaps the real question for the Company is how can we make it safe for men to care for each other in this way?" It's not so easy to remember now precisely the impact this had. I did at the time just "know" that it was the right thing to say at the right moment - partly because of the thoughtful silence that followed, and the way I was included in the movement into action. The conversation turned to a consideration of different human and cultural contexts for safety (e.g. is caring a natural human response), and at the end I was hired to visit some of the company sites around the world to develop ideas for bringing aspects of cultural inquiry to their safety effort (Farrands, R. (2007). In preparation).

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<sup>80</sup> My contact with the client was a rather tenuous one. I had been asked by a Director to continue coaching him when he moved here from another organisation with which I consulted regularly, and I had had slight previous contact with the OD manager. The OD manager had invited me to this meeting following a couple of preliminary telephone discussions on the question of Corporate culture and safety on which I had done some previous work. Meetings like this are set up to not over commit either of the parties; they get a bit of a look at me from several angles – the Group HR director, the Head of Safety etc. while I have the opportunity to see if I might have something to offer. Sometimes there will be no energy for doing anything together, and there will be a kind of dance of dissolution (a couple of small meetings, perhaps a bit of a written proposal, but really going nowhere at all); other times a connection will begin, leading to a more substantial piece of work.

The flash of initial shock, associated with my passing contact with the situation in the pipe, aroused me. I felt “pity” and “anger”. Now I think back to the scene, I seem to remember that my body was shaking slightly as I heard the story – vibrating. This awareness was constructed partly out of what I saw (“looking for signs”); also what I felt. My whole body was present to the situation and it all responded<sup>81</sup>. I also realised a risk, from my own history, to be strident and self-righteous in situations like this. This double awareness of something outside my self, and also of something that was a part of my style arrived mixed up. It was not easy to tell what was arising from my ground and what from outside in my contact with ‘other’.

As I sought to take choice-full action I owned my own predisposition, and also my own feeling response. In taking ownership I also took some distance from my feelings and my automatic inclination to respond in a particular way. The way in which this “taking a distance” was expressed was by using a questioning format to make an impact, and also to manage my surge of indignation, and incipient self-righteousness. The question gave me sufficient distance – I put out my feelings, but also put them away from me in the form of a question<sup>82</sup>. The question grabbed attention (not only the content, but also something I think in my voice – a strong urgent speaking<sup>83</sup>), but also landed between us – what should *we* do it asked? Shortly after the meeting I was told by the OD Manager, “your question made us think – that’s why you got the work”. For myself I wonder if I could have been stronger in speaking up for the men who had died, and for justice for their families. This wondering arises partly out of what happened ten months later when I spoke of this case at the EGOS conference in Bergen, Norway in July 2006.

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<sup>81</sup> When I did my training in Gestalt I worked with a small group of others. Towards the end of our time together we took it in turns to sit in front of the rest of the group, not to receive feedback in the normal way, but for each member of the group to say what was evoked in themselves, by our presence to them. Rather than directing our attention to them we were being asked to receive them. I’m reminded of that here as I “receive” the whole of this situation, including the feeling that goes with my brief imaginative re-creation of the men struggling to reach their comrades and dying in the attempt.

<sup>82</sup> At the EGOS conference where I reported on this account I said:

“I also notice that the question form is in part a political response to help me to deal with the risk of alienating the audience by appearing “self righteous”; a question seems to provide me with a little more emotional self control – keeps me well away from a rant. I’m managing distance through inquiry.” (Gestalt Organisation and Validity, 2006: 5)

<sup>83</sup> I have no evidence from this apart from how I felt and the following comment from the Organisation Development Manager. My being at this moment in this meeting is memorable for me. If I think about standing in my own truth I try to re-conjure this moment. Writing about it also helps to consolidate it as part of my experience.

At the EGOS conference I presented extracts from the paper in which I discussed this case and made a number of “Quality Comments” on the paper. One of them referred directly to how this meeting was reported.

Overall I think I’m more concerned with impact than with genuine inquiry. This of course has its uses: this is a potential new client who I want to engage me. Judged in this light the questions work, but it is as well to be aware of this and not kid myself that I am doing something (e.g. opening a space for the dead men) that I am not in fact doing. I begin to reflect on older personal patterns and needs about making a good impression and how I respond in novel social settings. This takes me back to an earlier Gestalt article submitted to supervision right at the beginning of the doctoral journey. Is making a good smooth impression one of Rob’s quality criteria? Am I just being clever and powerful is the disturbing question that lingers. (Gestalt Organisation and Validity, 2006: 5)

I look back on this comment with sadness. It strikes me now as a dangerous half truth – a subtle denial of something important for me, and, as such, a refusal to step up to my own truth. The point of sadness is the way I discuss my own motivation for saying what I did say about the dead men. It is not that the point about making a smooth impression is incorrect, but that it is incomplete. Can you detect what I am doing? For example my slightly dismissive and distancing tone in the first sentence?

In fact I *was* moved by the story of the men; I *was* touched and angered. I *did* want to open up a space for them. I *did* think of justice for them and their families. In the September meeting in the Corporate HQ, I balance these desires against other factors, and ask a question. Later, at the EGOS conference, when faced with an audience of academics (I think now as I look back from April 2007), I play to that audience, and in so doing deny something important. I say only what I imagine the audience might like to hear from a well paid consultant. I seem to be so concerned not to claim a desire for truth and justice that I collapse into a kind of sceptical cleverness. Again I do not deny the truth of the statement about “making a good impression” for the story seems to illustrate me doing just that. But I want to shout out also that it is a half-truth; moreover, one that is bad for me, and bad for others too. How can I live more of my truth, not less of it?

In the context of this case this question about my truth settles profoundly for me. It feels substantial. Savouring brings thoughts of courage. My supervisor thought she saw some possibility in me during the problems with my supervision group. Have I let down CARPP as well as myself? I think of what it means to be courageously in my truth: the quality of constancy. To stay true not just to live it when it suits another agenda. I have made a lot of money from this one moment in the office – a whole client system opened up before me. But I have not achieved what I most wanted in that moment. I was soon diverted onto other things. I don’t know what happened to the families of the men who died. To live in the world in courage constancy and truth: what might it take to participate in the world in accordance with such values?

In some way in the moment of speaking in that meeting I had participated in the horror in the pipe. I had reached across and made contact with the situation. It was only a passing glimpse but I think it invested my presence with something that I have found memorable and which caught the attention of the others present in the room. My subsequent EGOS experience, although essentially disappointing on this point, helped me to reflect back more fully on what that moment was about. Was it that in that moment of participation I was able to speak fully from my own experience? Is this what it means to live in my truth?

### 5.3. Resolution: participation, experience and knowing.

In this section I use Merleau-Ponty again to help me think about the questions and dilemmas being posed by the thesis as a whole, and this last chapter in particular. He has been my companion in the last half of the journey: I call upon him to help me in these final reflections. How will thinking with him help me to a fuller understanding of the complex dilemma sketched out at the end of the previous section. I think also of how I was moved at the end of the previous section to remember my commitment to CARPP. How can my thinking at this stage in the thesis be for myself and also for my friends and colleagues in CARPP? I would also like to offer something back that in addition to reflecting on my questions around energy and excitement also offers something about the process of my journeying: what have I uncovered about first person inquiry and its relationship to the wider field of action research?

As I face these questions, I am aware also that I can continue to write in a way that is open to what emerges. In this way my writing may yet take me to unexpected places – even as the end approaches. These reflections release me to seek synthesis and conclusion as I don the habit of ending.

#### *Participation*

In these paragraphs I am going to look more fully at the question of how I participate in the world, as a device for seeking out connections between action research, phenomenology, and Gestalt. I do this in the knowledge that participation means something in all three domains of thought, and also out of the awareness that participation has surfaced out of my reflections so far in this chapter. I am relying on an intuition that this will be a fruitful device, in the knowledge that the proof of the pudding will be in the eating. I hope that this reflection will help to pull together the rich themes that have emerged so far and enable some synthesis in service of responding to the questions concerning life energy and action research that were posed at the beginning of this chapter.

According to the way I was taught Gestalt my subjectivity comes alive as *I act* to satisfy needs and desires. Experience arises out of acting – acting and experiencing are correlated in this modelling of human being. My understanding of this idea was subsequently modified through my engagement with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, when I came to see that needs may not appear as determinate thoughts, but may arise as part of an embodied response to a situation – an embodied way of locating ourselves. Also, that our own self may appear in other ways than simple needs – particularly as prejudgements, or habits about how to be in a particular situation. For example, a desire or inclination to act like a “helper”, which Hellinger wrote of in relation to Constellating can be considered a mode of acting in particular situations, and therefore as a way of experiencing the world. In short, in the case of an existential phenomenology such as that presented by Merleau-Ponty, needs, preconceptions etc come less from a storeroom inside our head, and more from our way of relating to our



situation in the world: "...man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself." Expressions such as this worked in me gradually, throughout the second half of the doctoral journey. As they did I began to appreciate that I might find resources, and energy, through engaging more fully with my situatedness in the world. This gradually enriched my idea of what it was that I was involved in as I engaged in first person inquiry. I especially began to understand "critical subjectivity" (Reason and Marshall, 1987: 113; Heron and Reason, 2001: 184; Reason and Bradbury, 2001; Reason and Torbert, 2001) as being less concerned with introspection, and more with opening to my connection to the world. What does this mean – to appreciate critical subjectivity through connectedness? To respond to this question I need first to address exactly how I am coming to understand my connectedness.

One formulation of such a "connection" to the world that figures in the action research literature is that of participation. Reason and Bradbury place "Participatory Worldview" at the centre of their understanding of what differentiates action research from other modes of research, and shapes a fundamental set of beliefs concerning epistemology, action, and purpose for action research (Reason and Bradbury, 2001: 6-8). The same underpinning theme also appears in Reason and Torbert's article on the "Action Turn" in action research (2001: 7-8), and is essential to an understanding of the work of other action researchers: for example John Heron's work on collaborative inquiry (Heron, 1992 and 1996), and Marshall's work on the essential connectedness of "Living Systemic Thinking" (2004: 305-308). Participation also appears as a feature of the more general field of qualitative inquiry, as is illustrated by Kincheloe & McLaren's consideration of performative styles of direct intervention (2005: 314-315), and Bishop's reflection on Maori approaches towards creating knowledge (2005: 118-120), and the colonial roots of positivist approaches towards anthropological research on other peoples. Denzin and Lincoln (2005: 33-35) also identify a participatory mindset as being an essential aspect of action research as they locate it within the wider field of academic research.

Inspecting the literature reveals a mixture of truth and desire. On the one hand participation is taken as a core metaphor for revealing the state of human beings relationship to the world:

We participate in our world...the 'reality' we experience is a co-creation that involves the primal givenness of the cosmos and human feeling and construing (Reason and Bradbury, 2001: 6-7).

On the other hand participation is also a compelling metaphor for epistemological and methodological concerns (Reason and Bradbury, 2001: 8-9; Greenwood and Levin, 2005: 58-60; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 33-34;) designed to "produce radical, democratizing transformations in the civic sphere" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 34). In this way "participation" symbolises both an underpinning *world-view* (a 'truth'), and also a fundamental epistemological and methodological *commitment* (a desire).

How can I now use this mixture of truth and desire to take my own inquiry forward?

I have also come to experience participation as a feature of Gestalt and phenomenology. Participation is arguably a fundamental aspect of a part whole configuration: how does the part participate in the whole? This aspect seems to me to be fully taken up in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy as he addresses how we are situated in the world. As I have engaged with Merleau-Ponty I have experienced his commitment to participation as one that is absolutely immediate: not a spiritual, rather distant, wish, but a practical everyday reality of living a life. On the other hand I have come to understand with him that the world is a strange place where I can never locate myself with absolute clarity. I simultaneously participate in the world as if it was my place – my home, and also as if it was a strange land to be explored. These two primordial modes of participation found two movements of inquiry. One that turns towards my home to understand better my participation in that home: another that turns away from home, to better understand how I participate as a wanderer in contact with what is not me.

A growing realisation of the double edged, and slightly paradoxical, nature of my participation in the world caused me to step back from the first draft of my thesis in January 2007. I launched into an 18,000 word inquiry into *belonging* that, seemed strangely disconnected from the first draft: it seemed instead to connect to something working below the level of the words of the draft – something in the ground of the thesis. I intend to draw on the material I wrote during January and February 2007 here, in this section of the thesis. *How has my doctoral journey intersected the metaphor of participation? What does my journey say about participation? Also, what does my encounter with notions about participation say about my 'truth'?*

#### *Participation and belonging*

In these paragraphs I revisit the thought of Merleau-Ponty to ground my reflection in the intellectual development that has accompanied the second half of my doctoral journey. How can Merleau-Ponty accompany me now? As I call on Merleau-Ponty in the context of participation I need to address his thought from a different angle than that of Chapter Four, what does he tell me about how I participate? How do his insights connect with those from Gestalt and action research?

I wish to begin where I imagine Merleau-Ponty would begin - with the fundamental phenomenological concept of intentionality. This concept, as developed by Husserl, proposed an *essential interdependence* between acts of consciousness (remembering, asserting, inquiring, wanting etc), and objects<sup>84</sup> of consciousness (the memory, the idea asserted, the object of

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<sup>84</sup> I am using 'object' here as a slightly less clumsy way of saying 'thing other than me'. I'm not wishing, at this point, to get involved in the distinction between object and phenomena.

inquiry, the thing we want etc). According to Husserl's presentation of this interdependence, I never just look at some object in the world as if I was a blank screen receiving an image of the object, but always bring to the 'looking' some preconception or frame within which I encounter the object. My experience of the object then feeds back to adjust the frame I have of it, and to modify how I "intend" it the next time I perceive it (Sokolowski, 2000: 8). Merleau-Ponty's radical move was to de-intellectualise "intentionality" by describing how the intentional relationship operated between an *embodied subject*, and objects in the world. He referred to this as *motor intentionality*. According to this re-conceptualisation the intentional relationship between a person and an object of attention was no longer just a process of thinking. The person *participated* with objects in the world pre-personally and pre-reflectively. In this sense, the body was no longer thought of as just an object guided by a mind like a pilot steering a ship, but as a fully participating subject in the world – an embodied subject. The picture that emerges, through this re-conceptualisation, is that of an embodied subject thoroughly entwined with the things outside of itself that constitute the person's situation in the world. I want to explain my understanding of this entwining in a little more detail to draw out the implications for our *primordial participation* in the world.

Merleau-Ponty illustrates bodily intentionality with examples of practical relationship to objects. He notices how very complex bodily processes act in the background to support and underpin apparently simple operations, such as lifting a mug of tea to my lips while reading through what I have just written, or weaving my way through a crowded restaurant while attending to Bridget's smiling and welcoming face at the distant table. In these circumstances my body is normatively adjusting to its situation, based on habitual knowledge of how to raise the mug to the lips, and how to balance against gravity, as it manoeuvres between and around objects in the world. In relation to these types of physical tasks his conception would be similar to what sportsmen might call muscle memory. However, Merleau-Ponty also maintained that the same type of bodily account holds true for more complex states of being. Now, instead of our body reaching for the familiar mug in just the right way, or slipping itself through a crowded room, it leans into a familiar inferiority complex, or an oblique deflective emotional style, or a lonely, heroic stance to the world. According to his embodied way of thinking to have an inferiority complex means that, "I have made it my abode" so that while it is "not fate" [that is it is not completely set or determined regardless of circumstances<sup>85</sup>] it has "a specific *weight* and is not a set of events over there, at a distance from me, but the *atmosphere of my present*."<sup>86</sup> (1962: 442. Italics added). We are encouraged not to think of

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<sup>85</sup> It is not a determined abstract aspect of our character. It still arises in intentional relationship to a current object of consciousness and still rests to be described within this relationship.

<sup>86</sup> The language of "weight" and atmosphere" evokes something that is felt and experienced through the body not as a concept.

an inferiority complex as a mental state held as ideas in our head, but as a way of practically encountering, and living in, the world. It is a quality of our participation in the world. By this account some aspects of my situation evoke a certain style of response, which, through repetition, becomes even more habituated as part of my style. I do not, says Merleau-Ponty, necessarily deliberately *decide* to act as I do; instead I lean into this way of acting as a 'natural' way that feels right to me. The situation and my response are tightly geared. I *participate* pre-personally through being entwined with my situation.

Just how tightly "geared" is illustrated by the way Merleau-Ponty develops his description of how we come to retain a certain way of being in the world. He shows how events lose their specificity, and become general structures that guide our ways of acting, and shape a "*style of being in the world*" (ibid: 83-84). Imagine, for example, that at some young age, on being sent away to school, you<sup>87</sup> move to hug your father, but the move is resisted. You might, as a child, have neither the strength to surmount the resistance, or to abandon the attempt. You remain imprisoned in the attempt, which you might return to time and time again in different ways, either in the form of actual attempts at physical intimacy, which founder (as you now expect them to), or in the form of decisions not to make the attempt in the first place (which is, of course, different from never having had the need in the first place). Merleau-Ponty observes about these types of event in a person's life that:

Time in its passage does not carry away with it these impossible projects; it does not close up on the traumatic experience; *the subject remains open to the same impossible future*, if not in his explicit thoughts, at any rate in his actual being." (Ibid: 84. Emphasis added)

You continue, in some way, to be the young boy who sought to hug his father. New perceptions and emotions arrive, but these affect the content *not the deeper structure of experience*. In a sense this past comes to have some priority<sup>88</sup> over present lived experience. If this past event is progressively reinforced by repetition, then, after a while, the general structure of your response may outlive the specific memories: "it is of its essence to survive

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<sup>87</sup> I have deliberately retained the tense juggling that goes on at the beginning of this paragraph. I'm uncertain about whether to talk about myself, be more abstract, or speak with you the reader more directly. In the end I decide to do the latter in the hope that you might think of your own situations and try on this mode of analysis for yourself. The illustrative event of a child going away to school and moving to hug his father, and being rejected is based loosely on a situation in my own life.

<sup>88</sup> Merleau-Ponty referred to this surviving bodily habit as "sediment":

"...those events which sediment in me a sense not just as survivals or residues, but as the invitation to a sequel, the requirement of a future" (Silverman, 1988: 40-41)

only as a manner of being, and with a certain degree of generality” (ibid). In other words, in our example of the young boy and his father, unfulfilled emotional completion does not survive as thought, but as an embodied structure that shapes felt responses to particular situations in the world (for example emotional relations to other people –other men, such as sons, in particular). It becomes an “abode” into which the boy continues to lean even as he grows into adult hood. There is no place he can stand to unequivocally see himself acting in this way – it is just who he is, and how he acts, consistently and persistently reinforced by his experience. It is, Merleau-Ponty suggests to me, helpful to see personality as a structure of bodily habits, *which is always related to specific circumstances in the world*. In the case of the boy in the above example, experiencing a failed attempt at emotional contact with his father, the privilege accorded to this failed project looses its specific substance. It survives as a kind of generalised *feeling*, which regulates his behaviour in the world through a *subtle normative process*: it becomes how he responds to certain circumstances presented to him in his situation. This *abstraction of the specific event into a general felt state* settles into a way of being as a kind of sediment<sup>89</sup>.

Through this concept of embodied subjectivity, created and sustained by worldly contact, Merleau-Ponty conveys a vision of human beings living in time – that is in history. Each present moment is haunted by aspects of a *lived* past that are retained as general structures that shape each person’s style of being in the world. He refers to these as “temporal structures”, because they are carried forward from our past to be taken up again and again in our present moments. This is the sense in which what we refer to as “personality” can be considered our temporality – our existence in time, or the structuring of our embodied self by the sediment of that historic existence. This “structuring” emerges in the present as a certain patterning that is revealed as I act within the current situations of my life. Such a historic structuring suggests that I *participate in the world from out of my whole situation*. Another way to say this would be that I participate by *belonging* to a kind of home that is continuously reproduced as a patterned response to my current existence. Such a new understanding about how I participate through deep belonging to my situation turns my attention (as the doctoral journey progresses) away from introspection, and private mental models, and more towards the public arena of *bodily experience*<sup>90</sup> and

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<sup>89</sup> Merleau-Ponty uses an examination of repression to illuminate our healthy state of being. What is repressed becomes a general anonymous structure which constantly pulls us back to certain ways of being in the world:

“All repression is, then, the transition from first person existence to a sort of abstraction of that existence, which lives on a former experience.....until only the essential form remains. Now as an advent of the impersonal, repression is a universal phenomenon, revealing our condition as incarnate beings by relating it to the temporal structure of being in the world.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 84)

<sup>90</sup> “I am a psychological and historical structure, and have received, with existence, a manner of existing, a style. All my actions and thoughts stand in a relationship to this structure.....The fact remains that I am free, not in spite of, or on the hither

*acting*. This is associated with an increasing interest in what is habitual and patterned rather than consciously chosen<sup>91</sup>. As I turn my attention towards my situatedness I also come to a fuller understanding of how difficult it is to separate my experience of the natural world from that of my social or cultural world. This may seem surprising as throughout the journey I have from time to time sought to describe the natural world, and its effect on me. What do I mean by it being difficult to separate the natural and the cultural? This difficulty arises because in my situation in the world the natural and the cultural are mixed together. How are they mixed together?

When I stand on my yoga mat and experience the Sparrow Hawk may I claim that as “natural” experience? If you were to look closely at the language you would see terms like “bank” and “yaw” being used, which are clues that I have flown gliders. How are my experiences of the natural object, and my sedimented knowledge of flight interacting here? Can I really pull them apart? You may remember also, that in close accompaniment to the experience of the Sparrow Hawk, came, wrapped in a surge of feeling, the poem by Gerald Manley Hopkins. How was my experience of the bird being influenced by my felt experience of the poet? I

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side of, these motivations, but by means of them. For this significant life, this certain significance of nature and history which I am, does not limit my access to the world, but on the contrary is my means of entering into communication with it. *It is by being unrestrictedly and unreservedly what I am at present that I have a chance of moving forward...I can miss being free only if I try to by pass my natural social situation.*” (PP 455-456. Emphasis added).<sup>90</sup>

<sup>91</sup> In this sense I would have to challenge Macmurray, referenced by Reason and Torbert (Reason and Torbert, 2001: 8), as asserting, “Action is not blind”. According to my understanding of Merleau-Ponty then much of the time *it is* “blind”, in the sense that it is not guided by determinate thought. I would also question, what seems to me to be an the over reliance by Reason and Torbert on “conversation” creating social realities, when they quote Ford and Ford with approval:

“The reality of groups, organisations and wider society is a social construction, which is *primarily established and maintained by conversation*” (Ford and Ford, 1995, referenced by Reason and Torbert, 2001: 10. Emphasis added.)

This seems to me to underestimate the depth of embodied socialisation that arises from our deep participation in our world. Does our experience not sediment in us ways of acting on which our conversing is based? This “underestimating” also seems to occur when the authors imply a distinction between natural and social sources of experiential knowing. As I discuss in the following paragraph it may be impossible to know whether our experiential ground arises from social or natural sources. In these circumstances, “political bias which values the experience only of socially dominant or religiously like-minded groups”, may not be behaviour that “fails to honour experiential presence” – it may, on the contrary “be behaviour that is honouring “the fundamental grounding of all knowing” (Reason and Torbert, 2001: 7). Not only do we live in an intertwined social and natural world, but that intertwined world is also ‘in’ us.

can also think of how our cultural life as human persons is affected by basic shared aspects of our bodily situation. I stand balanced against the constant force of gravity relying on complex movements of hip knee and ankle joints to happen in the background: as I do I induce a flurry of metaphors about our shared “up” an “down”. For example I associate “up” with freedom and spirit. The Sparrow Hawk “lifts” my spirit – moves me I think partly through the accretion of cultural meaning. I also think of a figure as rising from its ground, and allocate the functions of creative imagination to the “up”. The shape of my body also induces a horizontal field with a front that disappears ‘into the future’, and a back that is a mysterious past. I would seem then to participate by *being a part of an interwoven natural and cultural fabric*. This interweaving seems to me to strengthen my sense of being situated, because I cannot somehow appeal to a higher order in nature – at least not unambiguously so: you may doubt the sense I make of the fox on my lawn.<sup>92</sup> In summary, my engagement with Merleau-Ponty from mid 2003 onwards, works within me a transformation in how I see myself. I come to locate myself *as participating in the world in a particularly immediate and vital way*. I belong in a certain way. This “certain way” is through my situation, which is a historic, embodied place towards which I lean, or yearn to return. *Participation as belonging to a place* in the world suggests a conservative or bound nature to my/our human existence. Is this though the whole picture as it relates to my participation in the world? Is this the only way in which my doctoral journey has intersected the idea of participating in the world?

*Participation by travelling, or roaming the world*

Merleau-Ponty answers this question by showing that, although we are situated in the world we never come to know the world completely. He identifies a basic indeterminacy at the heart of our existence – an ambiguity that is constantly present. This makes our participation in the world more complex than simply belonging. Despite my connectedness I am free to make choices. Throughout the doctoral journey, I struggle with the fact that this is not only possible, but, furthermore, is demanded of me. How will I act in relation to my parents at this time in their life; what will I say at their 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary? On my understanding, the description Merleau-Ponty provides of how I am situated in the world does not imply a simplistic analysis of behaviour, based on a kind of embodied fundamentalism. We are situated, but we are not rooted. Merleau-Ponty points out that while we have bodies in common, the way we behave with them is far from common. We constantly evade “the simplicity of animal life” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 189), so that highly significant human behaviour deviates from the direction that might be considered “pre-ordained” by biology “*through a genius for*

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<sup>92</sup> It is not that we cannot find some natural reference points, but that they are open to interpretation. For example our bodily structure and its physical conditions and attributes are shared with others across cultures, and across time – as far as we know, we would recognise, and be recognised, as human by our most ancient ancestors. Yet these fundamentals are so incorporated into our cultural worlds that sorting nature from nurture is complex.

*ambiguity that might serve to define man*” (ibid). As he says “Everything is both natural and manufactured in man” (ibid). We are not definitively ‘caused’ to act by our nature, or our social circumstances, just as we are not completely free to move or do as we please.

When I stop developing my draft thesis, and initiate a new piece of writing in early 2007, I use a metaphor in which I am a traveller, following the path previously trodden by Merleau-Ponty. I describe the discovery of an old journal with a faded map, and frame my engagement as an expedition to re-trace his steps. Within the structure of the metaphor of the journey of exploration, I imaginatively create a world in which I *participate in the world as an adventurer*. I leave my place (my situatedness), and adventure forth into a strange landscape. I am alone. I have to find my own way. In this way the metaphor re-creates some aspects of the doctoral journey. The introspective nature of my start as is disclosed in Chapter Three of the thesis, and the failed MPhil to PhD transfer meeting in July 2003. Yet the metaphor of the adventure also shows me engaging with otherness – moving into a strange landscape looking for *someone as well as something*.

The adventure of moving into strangeness provides a counterpoint to the idea that I participate in the world by belonging to a place in the world. Yes, it seems to me that I participate through belonging within a situation, but I also participate by travelling from that ground to encounter ‘other’. I belong, and long to return home, but I am also an adventurer who travels out from that home to contact others: I am sedimented and I am open. In both modes I am in the world. I am not inner and outer, but in motion on the surface of the world: moving back to my home and moving away to encounter ‘other’.

#### *Mapping participation- Equilibrium in motion*

As I thought through different modes of participation in the world in relation to my questions concerning energy I conceived of the two modes of participation, revealed through my engagement with Merleau-Ponty’s thought, as two poles within an energetic cycle, and represented this in my notebook as a drawing. This presentation encouraged me to think of the two modes of participation as being fundamental aspects of my journey of existence. A cycling into and out of belonging, in which there is no origin, but just a continuous dynamic like the breath in yoga: as an out breath completes itself, so it naturally turns into an in breath, and so on – the fulfilment of one initiates the other.

There is no longer the originating and the derived, there is a thought travelling in a circle where the condition and the conditioned, the reflection and the un-reflected, are in a reciprocal, if not symmetrical relationship, and here the end is in the beginning as much as the beginning in the end (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 35).

Although the reference here is specifically to “a thought” the same dynamic interdependence accompanies our embodied participation. This “travelling



in a circle” asserts dynamic interplay over any origin. While I am situated and bound in place to some degree, this is never complete. Yes, I understand my self through my situation, but I also have choice in how I take up that situation. Also, while my habitual body shapes my conscious thought, I have choices concerning how I take up my habituated body. I may decide, for example, to put to one side my bodily hesitation, my fear of rejection, my embarrassment, and draw my father towards me into an embrace. In ways such as this I avoid being fully determined by my own history, or by my biology. There is a gap in the effectiveness of any conditioning aspects of my existence, or, to use other words, a penumbra of ambiguity surrounds the conditioning acts. That is why Merleau-Ponty writes of “a genius for ambiguity”. The ambiguous is less to do with lack of clarity (my feelings of embarrassment may be extremely clear to me), and more to do with the advent of choice: the failure of the conditioning aspect to complete its work marks the advent of choice, and, fundamentally, our freedom.

The truly dynamic nature of this ‘system’ is then carried forward by the way the exercise of choice feeds back to alter the conditioning ground. In whatever way my move to embrace my father is received the act initiates a development in the structure of the relationship (this ‘development’ may be a reinforcement of an existing way, or the opening of new possibility), which then provides a changed ground from which the next actions will emerge. This interplay initiates a *process of dynamic equilibrium that is filled with the potential for metamorphosis*.

The key to understanding this metamorphosis is the notion of ‘gestalt’ to which Merleau-Ponty reverts throughout his philosophical discourse, namely, that a condition [the ground] is taken up by and transformed by what it conditions [the figure], such that the whole in which it functions as a condition is greater than and different from the sum of its parts (Burke, 1997: 62)

It seems to me though, that the healthy movement of the cycle of participation might be interrupted. I seem on my journey to have interrupted my healthy movement in two ways.

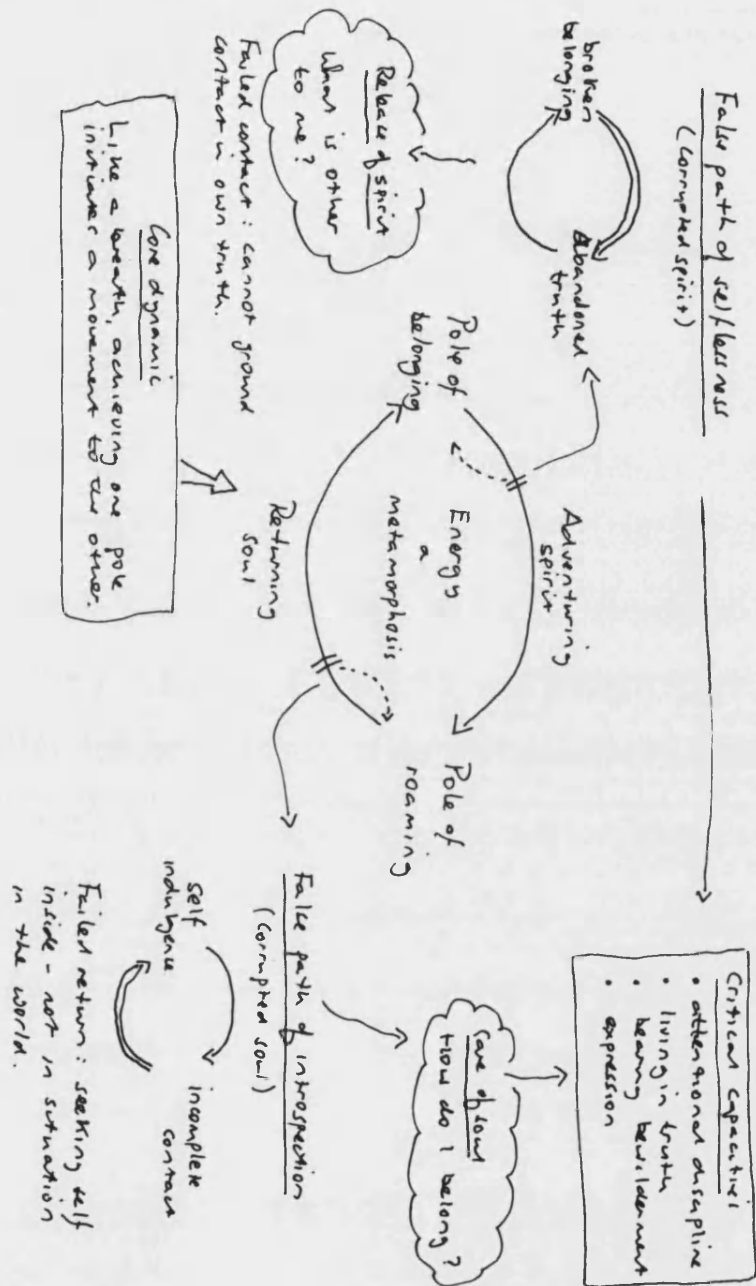
I have fallen into introspection and self-indulgence, and this has deflected me from the path of belonging, because I have sought myself, not in my situation in the world, but inside myself. I have also prevented my movement into healthy contact with others by not standing in my own truth. I have become selfless, and in consequence lost to myself, and this has proved to be a poor basis on which to contact others: they, metaphorically ask, what do you stand for? I am inconstant: I can only respond, “it all depends”.

When I looked back on this mapping I was reminded of a conversation with my friend and co-consultant Margareta in 2005 (as reported upon in the Introduction to this thesis). You may remember that at that time we associated the ground of the Gestalt figure ground configuration with a movement of the soul. We associated soul with what was connected and

foundational for each human being, and also for families and organisations, as when we refer to the soul of the family. The opposite of this we associated with what was imaginative and possible. With aspiration, freedom, and release, vision and dream. Spirit would be Nelson Mandela speaking up inspirationally from his prison cell. Soul would be Ghandi returning to his village and his roots. So, I conceive my participation in the world as two movements: care for soul and a release of spirit. Although the model asserts dynamic movement over origin, I have felt on my doctoral journey the pull to care for my soul as the stronger arc in the journey. I have gone forward with a backward glance towards my place of belonging in this world. I have hoped to find there something of my truth. This is a thesis of the backward glance – of longing to be.

I have deliberately presented my map in its hand written form. I like the transitional quality of this way of showing it, because it speaks to future inquiry. As I seek synthesis new questions are stirred up. Perhaps I will never stop being a process consultant after all. But I must let the map be for now and stop fiddling. What are the new questions that arise? Are there wisps of energy in them?

ENERGY & EXCITEMENT  
(notebook, vol 17, 2007: 10-11)



#### 5.4. Resolution: recapping, fresh questions, and new directions.

In this section I use a process of recapping on significant events in the thesis to reflect on the future. I adopt a structure of four parts as a device in order to facilitate my recollection and reflection. The first domain where questions arise for me is that concerning what it would be like to live in my own *truth*. This is perhaps the most vital and energetic area of curiosity that I am left with as the thesis draws to an end – the most unfinished perhaps? The second domain concerns *ideas*. The thesis has stimulated me to engage with phenomenology and other ideas, and I think that these interests will be pursued into the future; my life has been changed by my engagement with ideas. The third domain concerns the backward glance of which I spoke before – a glancing back to my *ground*. How will I continue on the adventure of exploring my situatedness in the world? The fourth domain concerns my *feeling* sensual self. How will I continue to work with the feeling that I have learned so animates my life world, and informs my creative thinking?

I adopt a further device to support my thinking within each of these domains. I use the metaphoric structure of ‘care for the soul’, and ‘release of the spirit’ proposed at the conclusion of the last section (see the hand drawn ‘map’) to support my thinking concerning activity and process within action research. Having discussed each area I produce a diagram, which proposes two contrasting areas of research activity, and then connect the activities with soul and spirit movements. This device is intended to stimulate thought around orientation, skills and processes for the putative action researcher; also to act as a kind of reminder for myself.

##### *Truth*

The case of the men in the pipe connects the end of this thesis with its beginning on the mountain top overlooking Bergen, following the July 2006 EGOS conference. At the EGOS conference I subjected parts of the Gestalt Review article in which the case was written up to a critical review. Then, in this thesis, I turned back to that review to critically examine some of the “clever” comments I made then. I thought that I was denying my truth. Do I deny my truth?

It’s not an easy question to answer. For one thing the whole idea of what is truth has been rendered problematic as correspondence theories of truth have been attacked, and we have adopted a more perspectival view on what is true; we ask true for whom, in what circumstances? I feel this as supporting my own reluctance to examine this question. However, the event in the corporate office proved to be memorable for me. My brief contact with the men in the pipe aroused strong feelings, which motivated my behaviour. I was excited. Should I have shown more of my feeling and my excitement? It subsequently saddened me when I saw myself denying my desire for justice, and the excitement this evoked, in my writing for the EGOS conference. I asked, have I become too sophisticated and subtle? Is it in the nature of the job of a process consultant? When I started the doctoral

journey I was aware that I might over rely on the energy of my clients; also I have reported in the thesis how I felt uneasy about being quite so selfless in service of my clients, and wondered about my own purposes. Has truth become a secondary feature of the process of engagement? Another way I have learned to look at this is by observing how rarely I challenge the broader frame within which many of my corporate clients work, even though I sometimes feel worried by what they do. I think that this doctoral journey has helped me to challenge myself to ask this question about my own truth.

Perhaps the most significant contribution towards my arising interest in truth has come from the approach phenomenology has taught me towards the real. For the phenomenologist what appears to my subjective self is primordial reality: it is a slice of the real. Yes, what appears is a perspective, and what it means is subject to interpretation, but I live in the real world, and everything else is based on this fundamental fact. I have shown how in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body this grounding in reality is reinforced through bodily participation in our situations in the world. This being in touch with the real is also what I understand Ladkin to mean when she discusses Husserl's idea of "objectivity-for-subjectivity" (Ladkin, 2005:121-125). Such confirmation of my essential grounding in reality, invests my experience with more dignity, and myself with more responsibility. It says to me that I bear a unique aspect of reality through my contact with what is other-than-me. At this point the phenomenologist also intersects (and reminds me about) my Gestalt training. For the Gestalt therapist or consultant the starting point is, "to say where you are" – to be fully present. This implicitly suggests that "where I am" is real for me. So, my engagement with phenomenology not only gives me fresh grip on the reality of my situation, it also reminds me that, in the sense just described, this understanding was always in my ground: what has covered it up?

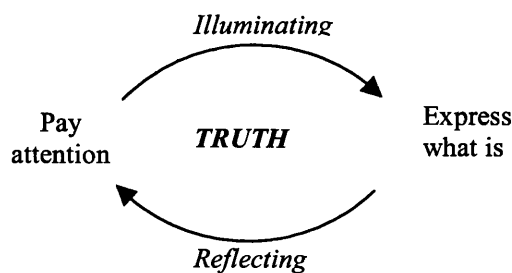
Perhaps it has been honourably covered, as I have sought to find my way in the large and often strange systems within which I work. I think of the strategy case reported in Chapter One – my bewilderment, my "cloaking. Have I, in some way, lost myself through being too responsive? Have I been overwhelmed? Do I now wander blindly?

On the 13<sup>th</sup> April 2007 I was in Uralsk in Kazakhstan working with a management team with my fellow consultant Michael. We were debriefing each other prior to a wrap up meeting with the client. Michael told me that he had been surprised to see me showing how irritated I was becoming with the group at one stage in the process. We were able to have a discussion about the sources of this irritation, and whether I should have named it in the group. Having disentangled it a little with Michael, I mentioned in the client debrief. The client said that he had noticed, and that he had felt angry with me as a result. This led to a discussion about an aspect of my irritation that Michael and I had identified, which was how the group members seemed to be ignoring, or disregarding each other. The client recognised that some of his anger probably arose from this as well, and we were able to

deepen our conversation about respect and care within the team. There seems to me to be a small clue here of a connection between what excites and animates me and what is true for me. Shall I now commit to showing more of myself, and dealing with the consequences? Will this, in some way, bring me back to a fuller life?

The phenomenologist and the Gestalt teacher join together to firmly, yet compassionately, remind me that I experience the real; and in so doing induce the self-question, *will I be true to this or not?* It is in the context of this question that I look back on the writing for the EGOS conference about my concern for justice in respect of the men in the pipe. Was I true to myself? I think that I spoke a half-truth. I think I have become skilful in half-truths. I ask, can this change?

My diagram for this domain of truth connects attentional discipline with expressing what is (saying where you are). It seems to me that developing skills of attention and expression are mutually reinforcing skills for any action researcher. As I have discovered in this thesis, expression may open the world as new words become like new senses for perceiving; and attentional discipline may illuminate what might otherwise be missed or taken for granted.



This diagram also demonstrates how I have resolved a question I posed at the beginning of the thesis (Section 0.4 – “Writing as inquiry”) on the paradox at the heart of the idea of *writing as inquiry*: the double pull between fully entering into the descriptive moment, and the awareness of the perspectival and partial quality of writing. In my introduction to writing as inquiry I raised this as a particular theme for me. How have I come to resolve this paradox for myself?

As the above diagram illustrates, my starting point has been my resolution *to commit myself to the possibility* of phenomenal perception – that I might know the things themselves, and might bring them to presence through description<sup>93</sup>. I make this commitment not in the expectation of completion, but in the hope (“possibility”) that it will open myself, and the world, to the mutual intertwining of self and other. For this reason I set out to describe

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<sup>93</sup> “The real has to be described, not constructed or formed” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: x)

not only what I see, but also what I feel – how things intrude into me as well as how I reach out to them. The Sparrow Hawk is a thing to be seen in the world; also something to be felt as a reverberation and a resonance with me. Closely aligned is a separate commitment, which has come to me with particular felt force in the last year of the doctoral journey. This commitment is the other side of my realisation that what I care for is vulnerable, fragile and transient. If things worthwhile have this quality then this reinforces for me their deep question-ability. The way to have things open before me is to question them – not, of course, as an interrogation, but as an exploration or revelation. This double commitment to phenomenal perception and to question-ability takes me back to the idea of figure and ground: description may be understood as part of the process whereby things configure themselves, or “presence” themselves from the ground; question-ability that which returns or holds the emerging figure to its contextuality – returns it to its connectedness with all else, which is also a return to the bulky silent world of felt existence. As we have seen in my discussion of figure and ground the conditioning shapes the condition, but is also itself then subject to being changed or developed by that which it conditions. There is work to be done here in the descriptive effort, and also in the questioning of that which comes from the descriptive effort: it is not work that can ever be declared as finished.

### *Ground*

I spoke at the end of the previous section of this being a thesis of the backward glance. I was thinking then of the way in which the doctoral journey has moved around my engagement with Merleau-Ponty’s ideas concerning my embodied connection to my situation in the world. It has been a powerful intellectual stimulus to understand just how grounded in my own historic existence with others, and the whole of my situation, I am. I have connected the idea of being grounded with being situated in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, and a participative world-view in the action research literature. I ask whether this has shown me a source of energy within my own existence. How has Merleau-Ponty helped me to connect to sources of energy and excitement that lie dormant in the ground of my lived existence? For example I have headed into an exploration of maleness within my family in the hope of unlocking something in my relationship with my sons. Also, I have found how memories of Alice as a baby animate me into scary, but also wonderful, surges of feeling. I say “memories”, but this scarcely does justice to the way my whole body can move to the felt presence of the past. I can do it now. I just hold out my hands as if I was cupping her tiny body over a bath of water, and the feelings of love and longing surge in to dispossess me. Is this what it feels like to be caring for my soul? Have I become too cut off from my own ground? How may I reconnect, re-commit? My burst of writing in January and February 2007 led me to think of belonging. The thought returns to me now. Is this the movement that will sustain my excitement? Is excitement and energy to be found in a movement of belonging: to leave, to long (the backward glance), to return, and to leave again?

On the assignment in Uralsk I reported on in the paragraphs on truth, Michael and I also had a conversation at the end of the first day's work. We spoke about our interest in building the right relational framework for the team of men with which we were working, using the event to help them slow down so they might treat each other with more respect. I told Michael about my interest in my relationship with my father and sons, and opened the possibility that this might be influencing my priorities for this work. Michael told me about the death of his father two months before, and of the last acknowledging conversations they had had before he succumbed to the cancer. We spoke together about how these experiences of ours might be helping and hindering our work. As we drew our conversation to a close, we realised that it would be helpful to check out whether our own inclinations were delivering a design, which really met the needs of the team. We put in an extra session at the beginning of the following day in which to open a much fuller discussion with the whole team about the purpose and design of the event. I think that we were taking note of the way our own ground, our situation, was potentially influencing the event – for the good maybe, but in a way that needed checking. During this journey I have become more sensitive to my intuitions and vague feeling states. I name them as my 'ground' speaking to me, and in naming them I honour, and – to some extent at least - realise them.

It seems to me that grounding involves a process of being able to see the self in context, and that this cannot be done without contact with others. The thesis shows me reaching for the idea that what is fundamental is a dynamic relationship between self, situation and world (see for example my attempt to explain this in section 4.5). Such a dynamic (participatory) interweaving means that we should perhaps see the perceiving self as a reflection back from the things of the world; moreover a reflection that is as much felt as seen. This "reflection" then founds fresh perception of the world, and picks up on a form of equilibrium in motion (the last paragraphs of Chapter Four), which delivers us a felt sense of a self as a relatively stable entity. Seen in the context of first, second and third person inquiry, this phenomenological positioning of the self intimately enmeshed with the world of "other", supports the wisdom of the action research scholars, who argue for the integration of all three modes of inquiry (Section 0.3 of the Introduction). Indeed separation of the modes would according to the above analysis be impossible, or, at best, a helpful abstraction, designed to support the researcher in focusing her research effort. For example, this thesis proclaims itself to be "first person" in its effort to correct my tendency towards self-absorption, distance and detachment from others; however it is full of second and third person inquiry. A question for the thesis has been what mode should be made figural and what should be left in the background? From the asking of this question, we might deduce that, for an inquirer, the ground to which all inquiry will find itself being drawn back, is the interwoven fabric of first second and third person inquiry.

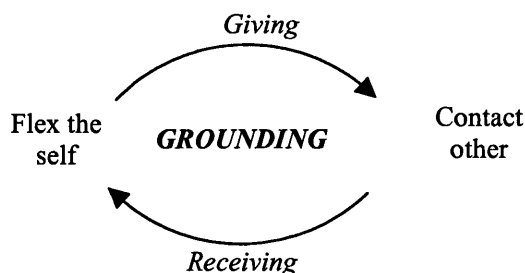
To illustrate this further allow me to highlight two second / third person aspects of the thesis.



- Perhaps the most obvious and most significant is the accompanying, second person, voice of my supervisor, who is occasionally brought from the haunting shadow into full visibility in the thesis. The e-mail exchange in Chapter Three and the other gentle commentaries of hers that litter the thesis show a style of second person contact that honours her pedagogic style: at once incisive, unsentimental and filled with human warmth. Merleau-Ponty would remind us that this voice of hers is also a gesture and, as such, is the figure emerging from a richer felt ground of contact, which has supported and sustained my research throughout the journey. “Socratic” comes to mind as a kind of felt metaphor for how I have been accompanied.
- We might also see the third person manifested in the thesis through the continual referencing of the significance of place within the thesis: a kitchen overlooking a harbour, an office in The Hague, an oncology ward in an Oxford hospital, a place to practice yoga, a supervision group in a room at the University etc. Sometimes these are places that I help to create in my role as a process consultant, and which I then have to decide how to occupy (or not) with my clients. They are places rather than spaces; already, always filled with affect and human possibility. As social spaces they have a third person role to play, colouring and suffusing with feeling the territory of my inquiry.

Nothing seems to me to illustrate the complex interweaving of first second and third person better than my relationship with the writing of Merleau-Ponty. His “third-person” writings re-stimulate my “second person” relationships across the board, particularly, for example, my contact with the living persons who still constitute my Gestalt community. I occasionally feel that he is watching me like a real living person – an uncanny refreshing experience for a tearful father. I also take his ideas on as a part of my own way to be, sometimes deliberately, as when I try to write descriptively in his honour, and sometimes – and forever – unwittingly from my deeply shifted ground. He has, I feel, entered the ground of my life, from where I receive his gifts, and from where I now reach out to the world differently.

The following diagram abstracts the essential movement of giving of oneself and receiving from other that constitute the inquiry territory, and inform each inquirer’s relatedness.

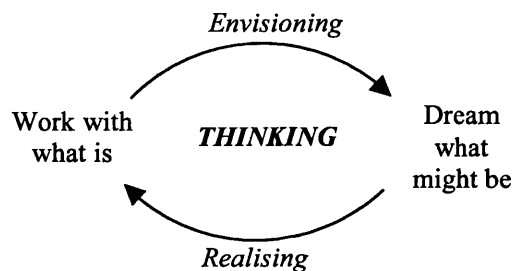


### *Ideas*

The method of this thesis has also involved a backward glance at my own written production. This kind of reciprocation - turning back to my own words to examine them critically - has been a core process for the thesis. I set out to write a thesis around the documentation of my life world. The ideas content of the thesis has also been subject to a similar motion of glancing backwards. I was introduced to the ideas of Merleau-Ponty at a Gestalt conference in August 2003. Before then I had been struggling to write about my Gestalt background. It was hard for me to locate myself in the journey. As I engaged with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, and recognised the Gestalt inspiration in his work, I began to centre my gestalt knowledge around the critical idea of the ground supporting the emergence of a figure. There then occurred, throughout the remainder of 2003 and into 2004, a fruitful reciprocation as my knowing self moved between phenomenology and Gestalt, finding that each was being enriched by the other. In the process of this movement and mutual illumination I was re-connected with significant aspects of my Gestalt past as I ventured forward in to the territory of phenomenology. The relationship between what I knew already, and what I experienced as new was, literally, vital. Through this dialogue I experienced knowing as, in part, a process of remembering differently. In this way my intellectual journey reinforced my interest in the ground of my life; also in the idea of a dynamic exchange between areas of knowledge; also my present with my past.

Despite the role played by recovering what I already knew, there has also been energy for me in the freshness of the phenomenological ideas with which I engaged from 2003 onwards. From an ideas perspective the doctoral journey marks a major investment of time and energy in the direction of the works of Merleau-Ponty. I have taken up his thought as a lens through which to glance into my own life world – not just Gestalt, but every thing else has gradually been subject to this lens. For example the case of W shows me trying to bring W within the whole of her situation, which is arguably an inspiration from Merleau-Ponty. Shortly afterwards I involve myself in Constellations training, partly out of a desire to explore bodily connection – again showing the influence of embodied phenomenology. During this training I also work on my own situatedness, particularly in respect of my relationships with my sons, in the historic context of my relationship with my father and his with his father. Through Constellations work, and continued reading of Merleau-Ponty (and others too), I become more sensitive to locatedness and emplacement: this sensitizes me to other aspects of qualitative inquiry, such as that provided by 'new' authors such as Ivan Brady (2005: 979) and Kathleen Stewart (2005: 1027), who emphasise being in place, and emergent sensual responses to location and otherness. Sitting on my desk now are a clutch of books culled from examining their bibliographies. I'm excited by the prospect of being able to connect up my own poetic leanings with these anthropologists. How will I sustain the energy of the intellectual engagement that I have discovered on the doctoral journey? How might these new interests leak into my consulting work?

Thinking has for me also become irrevocably associated with writing as a result of this doctoral journey. I have always written, but never like this before; never in such a sustained and concentrated way. I have also never written within such a supportive and critical situation as has been provided by my supervision group. I will miss this. Writing is now a fuller part of my life. I write several times a day in my notebook, which is my constant companion. I seek in my writing to develop my capabilities in describing what is happening to me: I have even started to regularly write poetry as a result of this doctoral journey – a strange outcome from a doctoral journey perhaps. I have come to see my thinking as connected to working with what is – crafting, hewing, articulating; also with what is possible through imagining, dreaming and creating afresh. Processes of realising – bringing to life- and also envisioning the possible have been important to me on the journey, so I have included them as fundamental processes of thinking in my chart.



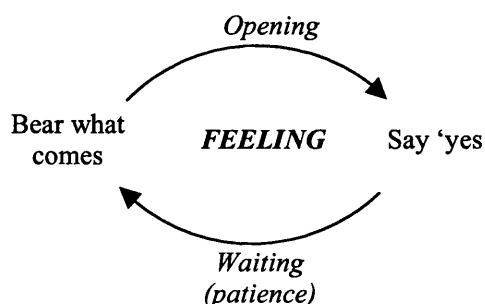
### *Feeling*

The questions concerning truth in the first paragraphs of this section connect directly to my feeling responses. In the meeting in the corporate headquarters my response was a felt one. I struggled to contain the surge of feeling. What was true for me at that moment in the office, did not come coolly as an idea or a concept, but wrapped in feeling, just as Rilke, Merleau-Ponty and Sonia Nevis would tell me to expect. I would not say that on this doctoral journey I have learned to feel. I think I started out as quite sensitive to my feeling states. However, what I think has happened is that I have been given a fuller frame within which to understand the significance of my feeling self. I am more alert to my feelings, because I recognise their epistemological value. I have become reacquainted to the sheer significance of bodily feeling in human life. I can see more clearly that my bodily animation is exciting in itself, and that it is doubly so because my carnal response offers a route through to my truth. How can I continue to utter that invitational “yes” and to bear what comes?

It is rather strange that I have been reawakened to the significance of my sensual self through ideas about feeling: strange that a philosopher now dead should have helped to prepare me for the sad and difficult events of 2006. I have reflected on this ‘strangeness’. I have spoken with my supervisor about it, and also with Bridget and others. It remains a bit of a mystery to me. He is a philosopher not a counsellor to a disoriented and

bewildered father. I think one thing that has attracted me to Merleau-Ponty is that he has offered me a compelling vision of how to get closer from a distance. His style is remote yet he engages me completely. He convincingly argues for a carnal and sensual component to human existence in a way that is logical and seemingly detached<sup>94</sup>. This might be seen as a criticism, but I think it is an approach that coincides with exactly what I needed as I struggled with a surfeit of feeling, and disorienting emotion. He has kind of normalised extremes of feeling for me, and I have found this a very supportive way to engage with them. I didn't need to be taught how to feel, but I did find it transformational to have feeling so honoured, and given such a respectful place in processes of knowing.

I find that, as a result, I am experimenting with both being more open to my own feeling state, and also subjecting it to more inquiry. This involves two discrete moments. I deliberately seek to keep my mind at bay if I feel an upsurge of emotion, adopting the stance that I will, "let it come". I also allow my body to move under the stimulation of the sensual; also I experiment with moving my body to stimulate felt responses (like holding my hands 'just so' to re-encounter my child when she was little). I construct this for myself as a kind of emotional yoga, drawing on the idea of keeping thought at a distance – opening a space for the bodily experience. Once the surge of emotion (typically, during 2006, this would be unexpected tears, but there have also been other more pleasurable sensual encounters with the world) subsides I find that I am now more interested than I was in 2003, in thinking through what has happened. I tell myself that I must make a space for both aspects of my existence whilst also carrying from yoga the mantra of the voracious greediness of thought. I want to incorporate this into my attentional disciplines, improving both my ability to feel and to think, partly through a process of recognising the integrity of both.



But a chart does not seem right for "feeling". Not the right way to end the thesis either. Too abrupt, too distant, to remote! So here is a little story about feeling, and about being in place – being situated in my life world.

On Easter Sunday 2007, Bridget and I were visiting a friend in Penrith, Cumbria, for his birthday party. In the morning the two of us set out alone

<sup>94</sup> I mean by this detached from his own life for his books reveal very little about him or his personal feelings.

from Mungrisdale village, where we were staying, and headed up the side of Lonscale fell towards the mass of Blencathra. As we climbed in the early morning sunshine, the talk was of Alice. Of her forthcoming scan, and how we might prepare her, and ourselves, for whatever news would come. Slowly the village was left behind, and we were on our own, ascending the side of the mountain. I thought of our life together: our meeting at eighteen, our long marriage, our transformation into parents, and now this test with our daughter. I felt these pasts as a part of me, yet also realised that they were not me. Now was now. Here in the sunshine, on the gradual ascent up the fell, we were living a life together, working out how things would be for us, and our daughter.

Now we were alone with just the rounded mass of the ancient hills. But even here nature and humanity were intertwined. These hills were once deeply forested, but were stripped bare in a sixteenth century burst of shipbuilding. It is said that Francis Drake's ships were made with trees from these hills: culture and nature woven together. As we walked, Bridget was forced to carefully negotiate the small streams that occasionally intersected the path – her shoes were not quite good enough. Walking on, we began to make a game of navigating the damp parts of the hillside. We started to plan routes across streams and muddy patches. Having identified a chain of dry stones, or clumps of dry grass, we proceeded to leap, laughing, from stone to stone, grabbing at each other for support.

Caress  
Up the side of Bannerdale's naked slope  
Towards the bulk of Blencathra,  
Picking a path with Bridget.

From out of Mousthwaite Comb,  
A memory stirs  
Haunting my body's slope,

Angling my arm towards her face;  
Hand, caresses the folded fell of her neck,  
Stops her, turns her to me. (April 20<sup>th</sup> 2007)



**Appendix: catalogue of doctoral writing from March 2001 to February 2007**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Date &amp; Pages</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Farrands, R. (2000). Sustaining Dynamic Tension When Consulting to Complex Systems.	March 2001 8 pages.	Consulting case from a Gestalt perspective. Working relationally	Published in <i>British Gestalt Journal</i> , 2000, Vol. 10 (1), 4-12.
Update using the structure from our last meeting.	July 2001 10 pages.	Identification of PhD themes	Includes a note on establishing a Gestalt Centre on Cape Cod.
Story in draft: exploring the human in large systems.	March 2002 15 pages	Consulting case in large oil company.	My Supervisor is encouraging me to show more of myself.
Experimenting with account.	May 2002 17 pages.	Personal and revelatory. Includes e-mail exchange with Judi.	Describes an incident in my supervision group (Chapter Three of thesis).
Afterthoughts on account.	May 2002. 2 pages.	Comments on the previous paper.	
Postscript to accounts	May 2002 4 pages	Raises gendered aspects of supervision group.	Indirect exploration of whether my feelings of isolation are due to the gender mix in group.
Another Try.	October 2002 4 pages.	Experiments with Greek chorus as device for dialogue.	Rapid fire dipping into themes.
Conversation me and the world.	November 2002 11 pages.	Account of using Torbert's model of conversation.	Includes using the Torbert model to look at own style.
Conversation me and the world. No. 2.	Jan. 2003. 22 pages.	Development of previous paper.	Adds in account of an assignment in Brazil, Peru and Chile.

Short note of PhD themes.	Jan. 2003. 1 page.	Every day conversation creating social & personal identities.	
Conversation me and the world. No. 3.	March 2003. 20 pages.	Draft article for publication.	Not published.
Writing self and other.	March 2003. 14 pages.	Writing and the connection between expression and perception.	Indicates interest in forms of writing.
My PhD part one.	May 2003. 12 pages.	Emergence of identity and consulting practice.	
Practice account.	May 2003. 5 pages.	Includes interviews with co-consultant.	
Transfer papers.*	June 2003. 17 pages.	Fail to transfer. Disorganised and un-thematic cluster of papers.	Self absorbed and introspective.
Gestalt and Organisation consulting.*	June-Oct 2003. 23 pages.	Use coaching of executive clients to explore contact and awareness.	I find it hard to locate my personal roots in Gestalt.
Jan. 04.	Jan. 2004. 21 pages.	Writing about Gestalt training.	Shows influence of phenomenological connections.
April 04.*	April 2004. 21 pages.	As above.	
Applying the Cape Cod small systems model in organisations.	May, 2004. 7 pages.	Account of being on the faculty of a training programme.	I interview the participants afterwards.
Inquiring into my use of Gestalt in organisation consulting.	June, 2004. 50 pages	Integration of all previous writing on Gestalt.	Also experimenting with writing style.
Notes for a fuller study of constellations.	Nov. 2004. 25 pages.	Description of experiences on a training programme.	Includes accounts of constellation of own family.



Body and Process.*	Jan. 2005. 50 pages.	Transfer papers. Gestalt and Merleau-Ponty.	Includes phenomenological and Gestalt perspective on Constellating practice.
Work, body, field and practice: Merleau-Ponty's life world.	Oct. 2005 15 pages	Description of my understanding of MP's philosophy.	Use writing to explore my understanding.
Advocacy and Inquiry.	Dec. 2005. 6 pages.	Historic account of my use of the model in consulting work.	
Choice, habit and context in organisational life.	May 2006.	Paper for Gestalt Journal (expected June 2007)	First draft prepared in Oct. 2005.
Gestalt organisation and validity.	June 2006.	Paper prepared for EGOS conference.	

\* Papers modified, and re-submitted to subsequent supervision meetings, but not catalogued separately in this table.



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